







# *CURRENT PROBLEMS*

General Editor:

ERNEST BARKER, LITT.D.



# BRITISH STRATEGY

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*General Editor:* ERNEST BARKER

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# BRITISH STRATEGY

MILITARY & ECONOMIC

*A Historical Review and its  
Contemporary Lessons*

BY

ADMIRAL SIR HERBERT RICHMOND

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“War is commonly supposed to be a matter for generals and admirals, in the camp, or at sea. It would be as reasonable to say that a duel is a matter for pistols and swords. Generals with their armies and admirals with their fleets are mere weapons wielded by the hand of the statesman. It is for him to decide when to strike, where to strike, and how to strike; and to enable him to strike truly and effectually he must first know definitely and exactly what object he wishes to obtain by striking.”

SIR JOHN FORTESCUE, *British Statesmen of the Great War*, p. 267.

“The office of the statesman is to determine and to indicate to the military authorities, the national interests most vital to be defended, as well as the objects of conquest or destruction most injurious to the enemy, in view of the political exigencies which the military power only subserves.”

ADMIRAL MAHAN, *The Influence of Sea Power on the French Revolution and Empire*, Vol. II, p. 392.

“The desire for isolation, the knowledge that it is impossible—these are the two poles between which the needle of the British compass continues to waver.”

R. W. SETON-WATSON, *Britain in Europe, 1789-1914*, p. 37.

## INTRODUCTION

THROUGHOUT the great wars in which Great Britain has at different times been engaged as the ally of other states, one outstanding strategical problem has presented itself to her statesmen—that of how most effectively to combine her national strength, in its various forms, with the armaments and efforts of her allies. That national strength consisted not only in the fighting forces at sea and on land but also in her finance, her commerce and her geographical situation. It was never an easy problem; it was never the same problem.

Stated in the baldest terms it was this. The conditions of Britain's existence required that she should possess a navy superior to that of any reasonably probable combination of enemies, without which she would be exposed to the danger of conquest by invasion or ruin by the loss of her commerce; and an army sufficient to garrison her metropolitan and oversea territories. In what manner could she best employ those instruments, together with her commercial power and geographical position, in combination with the military forces of her allies? Should her aim be to

strengthen the armies in the main theatre or to weaken those of the common enemy? In other words, should she strike at the main forces in the field or at the lines of communication, military and national?

The problem thus set to Great Britain, throughout the course of modern British warfare, was the problem of the relative proportions of military strategy in the more limited sense, and of naval and other action directed to the prosecution of what is nowadays called "economic warfare". That problem will be the theme of this book; and an attempt will be made, by an historical review of nine major wars in which Great Britain has been engaged since the reign of Elizabeth, to disengage the permanent considerations bearing upon its solution.

# BRITISH STRATEGY

## CHAPTER I



### THE WARS OF ELIZABETH

Amongst the soldiers this is muttered,  
That here you maintain several factions;  
And, whilst a field should be despatched and fought,  
You are disputing of your generals.  
One would have lingering wars with little cost;  
Another would fly swift, but wanteth wings;  
A third thinks, without expense at all,  
By guileful fair words peace may be obtained.

*I King Henry VI, Act I, Sc. i.*

It is possible that when Shakespeare wrote those words he may have had in mind the disputes as to how the war with Spain, which had then been dragging on for some fifteen years, should be conducted. After simmering for about twenty years matters had come to a head in 1585 when it became clear that peace could not be preserved by "guileful fair words"—accompanied by acts of injury. When in that year King Philip's intention to subdue England was clearly disclosed, the need to preserve the Dutch provinces from conquest was brought sharply home to the Queen, for two reasons: "the access and planting of the great Spanish forces so near to this country" would

expose it to constant danger of invasion; Spanish rule in the Low Countries would place an economic weapon in the hands of Spain. Nineteen years earlier the Spanish ambassador had pointed out to his master that the stoppage of the trade with the Netherlands would certainly bring about England's collapse—a forecast, on a small scale, of Napoleon's "Continental System".

The Queen had two courses of action open to her. The immediate object was to enable the Dutch to avert defeat. How, with her limited resources—for she was a needy sovereign—could she best aid the Dutch? She might strengthen them by sending troops to reinforce theirs; or she might weaken the enemy by cutting his communications. His army and its supplies reached Flanders by sea; the bullion that paid the expenses of the war came across the Atlantic; the naval stores which equipped his fleets came from the Baltic; and the loans he was forced to obtain in the intervals between the arrival of his treasure from the Indies were from the banks in Italy and the North. But the Queen's choice in 1585 was not free. The situation of the Dutch did not appear to admit of delay; immediate help was needed, and economic pressure is slow in producing its effects. The most rapid action could only be by the use of an army: and 4000 men were sent to Flanders. At the same

time a fleet, with 2300 troops on board, was sent to attack the sources of his wealth in the Indies.

The army in Flanders, ill-equipped, unpaid by its Dutch paymasters, who themselves persisted in trading with the common enemy and even furnishing him with the goods of which he was in need, melted away, achieving little. The expedition to the Indies took some great cities and captured much bullion, thus inflicting substantial direct losses: but the indirect losses were more serious. The treasure fleets were held up, the Flemish and Italian bankers began to lose confidence in Spain's invulnerability, the bank of Seville broke and that of Venice came near to breaking.

I have ever considered (wrote the Venetian ambassador) the disturbance, the loss, and the diversion of the enemy as much as the booty he (Drake) might bring. . . . The King loses much of his revenues, greatly increases his expenses, and occupies so many of his men of which at present he is very short. It being certain that one year of war in the Indies will cost the Spaniards more than three years in the Low Countries.

Because of this gnawing at his vitals the King of Spain felt constrained to seek a quick decision; he must stop this drain by one decisive stroke. He prepared and sent his Armada with its invsionary army which met its defeat in 1588.

The question which then faced the Queen was, how should that victory be exploited? How should Spain be forced to abandon her aggression? On the main principle there was common agreement: that the most effective action was to stop the supplies of treasure, but there were differences as to how this should be done. The Queen, economically minded, wished to conduct the war "at little cost", and proposed to send small squadrons to prey upon the enemy in the Indies. John Hawkins would establish strong cruising squadrons off the coast of Spain and the Azores to intercept the flotas and galleons on their homeward voyages; above all, "as little to do in foreign countries as may be but of mere necessity, for that needeth great charge and no profit at all". He wanted a "determined and resolute war" at sea in contradistinction to the petty and inconclusive marauding strategy of the Queen. Drake wished to strike hard with a fleet and army at Spain's naval heart, Lisbon. Philip's maritime strength lay mainly in his Portuguese navy, Portugal was believed to be ready to throw off the Spanish yoke, and therefore help might come from the disaffected people, Lisbon be seized, and thus a base obtained from which a continuous blockade of the two principal commercial ports, Seville and Cadiz, could be maintained, all effective opposition

having been removed by the destruction of the enemy's navy. His plan was approved. As so often happens, the expected rising of the Portuguese failed to materialise, unexpected difficulties arose, and the expedition failed.

"Economic war" extended to the Baltic trade, since it was from the Baltic that the maritime nations drew the bulk of their naval stores—timber, spars, flax, hemp, pitch, copper and iron. If Spain could not obtain those goods, said Burleigh, she could not fit out "a fleet capable of carrying the meanest army". Corn came from the North and from France. All these goods the Queen declared contraband. Protests flowed in at once from the Dane, the Swede, Poland and the Hanse, whose trade in those goods was an important source of national revenue. Elizabeth met these protests in various ways. She answered the complaints of some with precedents taken from their own conduct in war, she was considerate to Poland on whose corn England herself was dependent in years of bad harvests, she bought the French corn: but she was adamant in upholding the general principle of her right to prevent the enemy from receiving any goods which nourished or assisted in any way his powers of making war.

Finally, means were taken to hamper the borrowing powers of Spain by making heavy



drafts upon the neutral banks, obstructing Spanish sales and purchases in the Northern markets and a variety of other acts. But though she thus hit Spain hard, she herself was not immune from financial troubles. She had lost her markets in Spain, Portugal and Flanders, Spanish control of the Rhine stopped her trade with Germany, and Spanish influence in the Hanse cities injured her commerce with them. Severe unemployment in the weaving trade was one of the results of this situation.

The problem of whether to help a friend by sending an army to his territory or by acting at sea against the enemy's supplies presented itself once more when Henri IV of France, threatened by the League and Spain, called on Elizabeth for assistance. She judged that England's security was bound up with that of France and that help she must. A Spanish conquest of France would place the harbours from Brest to the east in Philip's hands, French armies and ships would be added to the Spanish forces, the danger of invasion would be indefinitely increased. As in the case of the Dutch, the Queen's hands were forced by time. Instant help was being cried for. Hence 4000 troops were sent to Dieppe and a loan of £15,000 made to the King. That reinforcement staved off the immediate danger and possibly

paved the way for the victory at Ivry in the following year; but it was at a grievous cost in life. Penuriously supplied and equipped, three-quarters of the army died from want in the three months of the campaign.

If the Queen's economies in her armies proved expensive, no less did her attempts to win the war "at little cost" at sea. For the "Hawkins policy" of a determined and resolute war at sea she substituted a vacillating strategy of weak marauding squadrons. The Spanish navy was left alone. Unhindered, the King rebuilt it on English lines, and his treasure fleets, strongly escorted, crossed the Atlantic in safety, providing him with the money for paying his armies, his ships and his debts. Not a single flota was taken by the English seamen in all the subsequent years, while on the other hand England and Ireland were seriously threatened with invasion on more than one occasion.

Spain was eventually reduced, as Napoleon was later to be reduced, by exhaustion.<sup>1</sup> The great continental campaigns in which the King's ambitions involved her were beyond her powers. Energetic action at sea, as her men-at-arms recommended either in the Hawkins method or by combined operations against her naval centres, as

<sup>1</sup> *Vide post*, pp. 109-111.

Drake, Essex, Norreys, Roger Williams and others desired, would have brought that exhaustion to a head many years sooner. The Queen never saw the power her fleet possessed, and made her principal efforts on land where the enemy was strongest. For a million that she spent on the navy and naval operations she spent four and a half millions in France and Flanders. The monies she lent were not repaid—the Dutch owed her £818,408 and the King of France another £401,734. The decisive defeat of the Armada cost her no more than £161,185: her indecisive campaigns in the Netherlands alone cost £1,419,596. These sums spent upon the naval war would have brought security to herself, to the United Provinces and to France without the costly sacrifices her policy incurred.

## CHAPTER II

### THE NINE YEARS' WAR

WHEN England was brought by William III into the Grand Alliance of 1689, she found herself faced with a new strategical problem. She was now one of three Powers, the other two being the Empire and the United Provinces, whose object was to put a stop to the ambitious designs of King Louis XIV.

Speaking very broadly and in full recognition of the risk of over-simplifying an intricate question, initially the primary aim of English strategical policy was to use the united strength at sea of the two maritime Powers to isolate France from all external commerce. The economic weapon was to be their principal weapon. So, in a treaty of 12 August 1689, England and Holland engaged that neither party should trade with the common enemy or carry cargoes for him, that other nations should be warned against carrying French goods, or sending goods to French ports, and that their ships would be captured if they attempted to do so; and the various principalities which made up the Empire were to be asked to co-operate in

making this "boycott" of France complete.<sup>1</sup> It was hoped that the neutrals, whose interest in the preservation of freedom was not less than that of the allies, would join in a combined effort against a ruler who was regarded, at least in England and Holland, as a danger to the liberty of Europe.

The nations at the end of the seventeenth century were however no more prepared than their successors of later times to relinquish their individual trading interests for the common benefit of Europe. They confirmed Montesquieu's saying that "men are prone continually to desire the advantages of society without incurring its burdens". King William's hopes of co-operation were therefore quickly dashed to the ground. Sweden promptly declined to cease her trade in ships' stores, and went so far as to indicate her intention to give naval protection to her shipping when engaged in that commerce. Denmark took a similar line. In his reply to Sweden the English Secretary of State said that his country could not possibly countenance the supply of those stores to the enemy "being of more prejudice to us than muskets or any other things which usually fall under declaration": and in that to Denmark, that

<sup>1</sup> G. N. Clark, *The Dutch Alliance in the War against French trade*, pp. 32, 91.

nothing could so effectually prevent King Louis' success in the war as want of trade, which impoverished him, and particularly of Northern trade, which supplied him with the material essential to him for carrying on the war.<sup>1</sup>

Nevertheless, recognising the real needs of the Northern traders to sell the only goods they had for export, it was proposed the allies should purchase them, but for various reasons this proved impracticable,<sup>2</sup> and as the English maintained their attitude that these goods were contraband, and insisted on so treating them, Sweden retaliated by taking civil action against English and Dutch merchants in her country, while Denmark confiscated some Dutch ships. An attempt was even made to form a Northern alliance of neutrals on the lines of the armed neutralities of later dates, but this broke down owing to the mutual distrust between those Powers. Sweden, followed by Denmark, then proceeded to convoy their trade, but this was forcibly resisted by the allies; as the allied strength at sea increased, the neutrals' remonstrances decreased, and towards the end of the war Admiral Rooke seized a whole fleet of ninety sail of Swedish ships

<sup>1</sup> *British Diplomatic Instructions, Sweden, 1689-1727*, pp. 8, 10-12.

<sup>2</sup> G. N. Clark, *op. cit.* p. 100.

under the convoy of a frigate without disturbing international relations.

It was not, however, the neutral only who weakened the intended economic effort against France. The Spanish Netherlands poured their goods into that country and also served as a channel through which trade and supplies reached her from the cities of Hamburg, Lübeck and Bremen. Thus did constituent parts of the Alliance work in opposition in furtherance of individual financial advantages; and it must be admitted that this conduct was not confined to the neutral and the allied governments, for private traders in England were not ashamed to seek profits through illicit trade, while the great Dutch commercial cities conducted a most extensive clandestine trade with the enemy throughout the war.

Besides the question of the contraband nature of naval stores, the matter also arose of whether corn should be treated as contraband, as it had been in Elizabeth's wars. In normal circumstances there was no advantage in doing this, for France was a self-supporting country in corn, except for a very small quantity, a quantity so negligible as not to be worth the effort of interference. But when the French harvest failed in 1692, King William considered whether the stoppage of neutral corn into France might not influence the course of the war, and a scheme was discussed

for buying up all the Northern supplies. This, however, fell through on the grounds of expense, and in May 1693 the alternative was adopted of declaring corn to be contraband.<sup>1</sup> Protests were made by Sweden and the order was revoked a month later and corn ships which had been seized were released; but they sailed without their corn, which they were forced to sell in England.

From all these various causes the convention designed to isolate France and to cripple her war effort by economic pressure became practically a dead letter. As it thus proved impossible to obtain the co-operation of the neutrals and even of the allies themselves, the most that could be done was to maintain a contraband list which included all sorts of military equipment, and naval stores and "all other equipage that serves for land or sea...bound to the enemy's country". In spite, however, of the revocation of the order that corn was contraband, orders to bring in corn ships were repeated in 1694, and we shall see the policy of the stoppage of corn in times of a bad harvest revived in 1709 after the severe winter of 1708 had rendered France dependent upon foreign supplies. And the same was done under similar conditions in 1746.

Such then, in broad outline, were the general

<sup>1</sup> G. N. Clark, *op. cit.* pp. 116-17; Marsden, *Law and Custom of the Sea*, Vol. II, pp. 415, 418-19.



ideas governing the economic effort against France. There remains the military effort. The unpreparedness at sea of the maritime allies on the outbreak of war permitted the French King to send a large body of troops to Ireland in the first months of 1689, and until that island had been cleared of the enemy, and the allied superiority at sea re-established, England had to remain on the defensive. Her treaty obligations to Holland obliged her to send a small military force of ten battalions to Flanders and these were reinforced during the year of 1689; then fears began to arise in London that the Government intended to pass from a purely military defensive on the continent to an offensive. So at the end of the year the eternal controversy concerning the conduct of war arose in Parliament. England, said those who criticised the strategy, was making far too great a military effort, an effort which enured merely to the benefit of the Dutch who, on their part, gave England no help in Ireland. It was an error to become a "principal" in the French war. What happened on the continent did not concern England: she should confine her efforts to her own interests at sea, in Ireland, and in the colonies, and within the strict limits of her treaty obligations to the Dutch. The ministerial reply was simple. England could not afford to stand aloof from the

continental struggle. What happened in France and Germany affected her directly. If she failed to aid the Dutch on land they would be beaten, and in due time she herself would have to face a stronger France single-handed. The supplies asked for were granted.

The battle of the Boyne (1 July 1690) freed England from the most pressing of the dangers in Ireland, though simultaneously a defeat of the allies at sea in a battle off Beachy Head (30 June 1690) exposed the country to great danger; but their great maritime resources enabled them to recover the command of the Channel later in the year.

Though it was still necessary for some troops to be kept in Ireland after the Boyne for the purposes of the restoration of order and the elimination of the remaining French military bodies, there was now a far larger disposable surplus of troops for foreign service, amounting to some 20,000 English and 10,000 hired foreign troops. What should be done with them proved the question which Parliament had to discuss at the end of the year 1690. The old question was revived. Should the efforts of the country be concentrated on the sea in attacks upon the enemy's resources or should they be devoted in part towards increasing the allied armies on the continent? With the superiority at sea, which was

now definite, and with the strong military forces now available, it was urged by one school of thought that an admirable opportunity presented itself of sending an army to destroy the French fleet in its base—Brest. If that were done, it would be possible greatly to increase the pressure on French trade and even to make the economic effort decisive. But this line of conduct was not adopted. The troops were sent to Flanders, where an uneventful year's campaigning took place in 1691, while at sea a not less uneventful game of hide and seek was played in the Bay of Biscay, where the French fleet cruised in full force in hopes of falling on the Indian trade and the English fleet sought for the French; and neither the one nor the other found its quarry. The year, in fact, ended in a stalemate.

The campaign in Flanders had been not only indecisive but also extremely costly. Once more, when Parliament met at the end of the year 1691, the Government had to meet a storm of strategical criticism. It was represented that the campaign showed plainly that it was impracticable to expel the French from Flanders, that the allies were unstable, and would not help themselves but would take advantage of the protection given by the English to their territories in Flanders to conduct campaigns elsewhere for the purpose of

increasing their own dominions. England was, in fact, represented as the catspaw for these Powers. It was urged that a proper use would be made of the English resources if they were employed in attacking the enemy in his colonies; and that the ungrateful allies should be left to conduct their own defence in Flanders, while at the same time their power of doing so would be increased by the weakening of the French financial position. But the ministry held their ground. An army of 38,000 men, of whom 23,000 were English, was voted for Flanders, and a further 27,000 for home and colonial garrisons. But now defence was not to be merely passive. Plans were put into preparation to attack the two most dangerous French bases—Brest and St Malo.

These plans were upset by a French counter-attack. King Louis, in the belief that the allied fleets were separated and that there was disaffection in the English fleet and therefore nothing to fear at sea, ordered his fleet out to rush an army across the Channel. Both of these assumptions were wrong and the allies fell upon the enemy off La Hogue and defeated him. The French navy made no further attempt to dispute the command of the sea; direct attack upon commerce, on a grand scale, became its principal object.

When Parliament met at the end of the year

1692 the continental strategy once more came under criticism. It was admitted that there had been a great allied military victory, Steenkirk, but to what had that victory led? The Netherlands were as firmly as ever in French hands and, owing to the new direction that French naval policy had taken in which all efforts were concentrated upon the destruction of shipping, English trade was suffering severely for want of adequate protection. Without its trade the country would be undone. The sea must be given more attention not only for defence but also for offence. Once again it was repeated that it was over sea that the most pressure could be exerted upon France by the ruin of her trade, the cutting off of her supply of seamen, the capture of her principal naval bases and the fleets and shipping within them, and the occupation of her colonies which subserved her naval and commercial strength. What, it was asked, could be done on land which would yield results comparable to these? Neither in Savoy nor on the Rhine or in Spain could any effective impression be made by such an army as England could put in the field, while as to Flanders, there the British taxpayer was pouring out his money upon troops whose achievements were confined to aiding the Dutch and the Austrians to enlarge their own territories.

These arguments did not convince the Government. The proposals to confine the war to the sea and the efforts to economic pressure were rejected. Sixty thousand troops were voted for Flanders where, during the campaign of 1693, the allies, though they suffered some severe defeats, succeeded in preserving Flanders from conquest.

In the following year British aid to the allies took another form, a form it was often to take in subsequent wars. A French army had invaded Spain, Catalonia was largely overrun, its capital Barcelona was in danger of capture. If Spanish resistance in Catalonia should collapse, the rest of Spain would probably follow, for the Spanish armies were no match for those of France. Savoy, always a very doubtful ally, might then be expected to go over to the winning side. In this invasion the French army's main line of communications ran by sea from Toulon to Rosas Bay under the protection of the French Mediterranean fleet. To avert the impending disaster a British fleet was sent to the spot. The effect was immediate. The French fleet retired before it to Toulon, the French army, deprived of its supplies, was brought to a standstill, the Spanish guerrilleros were encouraged to act in a form of warfare for which they possessed a particular aptitude against the long thin line of the army's land communications,

so the standstill became a retreat. In the following year—1695—the pressure upon the French army in Spain was still further increased by attacks from the sea made by a body of some 4000 British and Dutch troops and by bombarding vessels along the coast of Catalonia.

By the year 1696 the strain of the long drawn out war was telling heavily upon all parties. Exhaustion was making itself felt. Though King William's design completely to isolate France had broken down, the losses of her sea commerce had caused her great distress, and though the neutrals and also many self-seeking merchants, allied and British, carried their goods into French ports and French cruising squadrons brought in booty both in money and materials, these were not enough effectively to relieve the suffering. That suffering, however, was not all on one side. The French cruisers and privateers preyed heavily upon the Dutch and English trade, causing great losses; nevertheless the allied trade was not stopped.

The West Indies played a small part in this war. It is very commonly asserted that Great Britain has continually and consistently pursued a policy of first embroiling the otherwise peacefully minded continental nations and then, leaving her allies to do the fighting, has enriched herself and

expanded her Empire by the capture of their colonies. The war of 1688-97 gives no support to this legend. Such action as was taken against the enemy colonies was, with one exception, of a purely protective character. The West Indian islands, whose defences had been neglected and their garrisons starved, lay practically at the mercy of the better organised and more highly militarised French islands. The exception is Canada. The northern colonists in America, who had long suffered from raids from Canada, regarded their French neighbours as an enduring menace to themselves, and war provided the opportunity to rid themselves permanently of this danger by the conquest of the French colony. An attempt was made to invade Canada but it failed, mainly for want of English co-operation with the colonial troops. It is indeed strictly correct to assert that throughout this war Great Britain deflected none of her efforts from the aid of her continental allies to pursue an "imperialistic" policy of acquisition in the colonies.

Summarising the effort of the English to assist their allies in this first round of the struggle against Louis XIV; that effort took three main forms: the economic effort against the French trade, warlike stores and corn; the military effort in the defence of Flanders; and the naval effort in



combination with the Spanish armies in the defence of Spain. The first of these failed to achieve its object because it proved impossible to obtain the co-operation of the neutral or even the loyal observance of the terms of the convention by the allies themselves. The second effort averted the rapid conquest of Flanders and contributed to involving King Louis in a great expenditure which greatly embarrassed his war effort; and the allied armies in holding Flanders, though they failed to expel the French from some parts of it, contributed directly to the economic exhaustion of the enemy; the third effort enabled Spain to resist conquest, crippled French trade in the Mediterranean, and aided the allies in Italy until, under the embarrassment of financial exhaustion, the squadron was withdrawn: then Spain, deprived of its support, collapsed. It was in the combination of the economic effort, the military defences in Flanders, the naval support of the military operations in the Mediterranean that a situation was eventually reached in 1697 which resulted in the Peace of Ryswick—a peace of compromise which recognised, in general, the *status quo ante*.

### CHAPTER III

## THE WAR OF THE SPANISH SUCCESSION

ON 7 September 1701 England was brought into an European coalition. The Treaty of the Grand Alliance of Austria, Holland and Britain made her a partner in a common cause in which she had the specific interest of her own security. Louis XIV's seizure of the Barrier Provinces was held to indicate that he claimed the Spanish Netherlands as his own; while at the same time his great efforts to incorporate the Spanish Empire with the French, and to make it a closed market for French commerce, threatened to drive the English out of this most important branch of their trade. So, in English eyes, England was threatened both with invasion from the Low Countries and with the destruction of a trade regarded as vital not only to her commercial life but also to the maintenance of her shipping and seamen upon which her security depended. She joined the Alliance to prevent France from acquiring the Low Countries and becoming the leading Mediterranean and the great maritime and

colonial Power, before whom she would have to bow down.

The strategical problem which faced the English statesmen was, as it had been before, how they should utilise Britain's strength in the common cause. She was bound by treaty with the United Provinces to aid them with an army of 10,000 men. Should she raise further troops and build up an army, to partake, on a larger scale, in the campaigns on the continent? Or should she throw all the efforts of which she was capable to cutting off the resources of France coming from oversea, with the French navy, French commerce and the French colonies as her objectives?

Thus, in grand strategy, the problem resembled that of 1689; but the conditions were very different. Then, Spain and the Spanish Netherlands were on the side of the allies; now they were at Louis' disposal, and the wealth of the Spanish Indies would support the armies of France. The highest importance was therefore attached in London to preventing this treasure from reaching King Louis' coffers. It was no mere selfish policy either of enriching England by the plunder of the treasure fleets or of expanding her Empire that governed the thoughts of those who urged a purely maritime policy: it was the sincere conviction that this policy would enable England to make the greatest con-

tribution to the common cause of which the maritime Powers were capable. It is necessary, however, to add that there was also a domestic factor, independent of the factor of pure strategy in the problem. "The interest on the national debt, the subsidies to the continental allies, the maintenance of the English army—all objects of malediction to the up country squire of that day—were paid for to a very large extent out of the land tax":<sup>1</sup> a tax which fell particularly on the Tories, who therefore opposed the strategy of continental operations. Still, with this reservation, there was a basic difference of strategical opinion, as there had been in an earlier time, between those who would send large forces to the continent and those who would attack the enemy's national lines of communication at sea and keep the continental commitments within the narrow defensive limits in the Low Countries.

It was argued by Dean Swift, in his celebrated pamphlet *The Conduct of the Allies*, that "England spent her vigour in pursuing that part of the war which could least answer the end proposed, and made no efforts where she could most have weakened the enemy and enriched herself, and allowed her allies to break their engagements and lay the burden of the war upon her". Among

<sup>1</sup> Trevelyan, *England under Queen Anne*, Vol. 1, p. 292.

the many answers made to those who opposed increasing the military forces on the continent one, of Addison's in 1707, deserves attention. It was not possible, he said, to rely upon exhausting the French strength by diversionary attacks; the allies must outnumber the enemy in the main theatre. The naval effort against trade and military communications at sea was an indirect and important contribution, but by itself it would prove insufficient to achieve victory. To that part of the criticism that England was doing more than her share in the continental war, Addison replied that if a ship were in a storm in which all might perish it would be madness for some to stand idle because others would not work. "Let us imitate the vigilance and activity of our common enemy rather than the supineness of our friends."<sup>1</sup> Thus the view taken by ministers of the strategical place of the economic effort in this war was that it was an auxiliary, not a primary, means to victory: no opportunities of injuring the enemy by its application were left untouched, but on the other hand nothing was allowed to interfere with the operations directed towards assisting the military campaigns and, in particular, those in the Mediterranean. Further, it must be noticed that no really effective pressure could be brought

<sup>1</sup> *Parliamentary History*, Vol. vi.

to bear without full Dutch co-operation and this could not be had: the Dutch remained as insistent as they ever had been on trading with the common enemy. One example of this—it is one only out of many—occurred in 1703. The Dutch had pressed for an extra 10,000 troops in Flanders and this was granted on the condition that Holland would cease this trade. To this stipulation they paid no heed, continuing it without the smallest compunction.

To return to the Government's strategy. Endeavours were to be made to prevent the Spanish treasure from reaching the French King. Hence at the outset 40,000 troops—18,000 English and 22,000 foreign—were voted for Flanders, and naval squadrons were sent both to the Spanish coast and to the West Indies to cruise for the treasure fleets, the commanders in the Indies being directed to persuade the Spanish authorities in Havana to place that great naval and commercial port at their disposal "for preventing our enemies being supplied with the wealth of the West Indies".<sup>1</sup>

Transcending, however, in King William's eyes the importance of the treasure and its influence on the war was the command of the Mediterranean. The late war had clearly shown how great a part

<sup>1</sup> Instructions to Admiral Benbow, January 1702.

sea power could play in that sea in the common cause, and though the situation now was different, with a hostile instead of a friendly Spain, Britain's Imperial ally would depend on being able to move his troops by sea both into Spain and Italy, and upon the enemy being unable to do so. If French armies were forced to move by the land routes, larger forces would be needed and heavier columns of supply, with the resulting diversionary effect of reducing the number of the French troops available in Flanders. But as no continual command could be maintained in that sea unless the fleet had a base where it could lie throughout the year and be victualled, stored and repaired, the first step necessary was to capture one. Cadiz was the place selected, and the instructions to the joint commanders impressed upon them that the expedition was "of the highest importance to our affairs and the common cause of us and the allies". The capture of Cadiz was not an end in itself: it was but a stepping stone to further things—the capture of Toulon, the destruction of French naval power in the Mediterranean, the invasion of France from the south, and the resultant weakening of French resistance in Germany and Flanders.

The expedition to Cadiz, delayed in preparation and mismanaged in execution, failed, but the fleet did not come home empty handed. On its return

voyage news was received that the Spanish treasure fleet from the Indies had put into Vigo Bay. Thither the fleet at once went. It forced its way into the harbour, captured about half the treasure, and destroyed the French escorting force of fifteen capital ships. This was a blow which gave great satisfaction both to the Government, who were badly in need of a victory, and to those who opposed the "continental" strategy. "France", so ran the address of thanks to the commanders, "had endeavoured to support its ambitions by the riches of the Indies: your success, Sir, hath only left them the burden of Spain and stript them of the assistance of it." Gratifying, however, though this was, the benefits fell far short of those which would have followed from a success at Cadiz.

Though importance was thus attached to the economic factor, and particularly to that part of it concerned with the Spanish bullion, it is proper to repeat that it did not at any time dominate the strategy of the war. The governing element of the naval strategy was the support which the navy could give to the allied military campaigns in two forms: diversionary attacks on the coast, and aiding the allies', and opposing the enemy's, military movements by sea. Prince Eugene needed protection for his troops and supplies across the



Adriatic. The Emperor's campaigns in Naples and Sicily called for the use of the sea routes and, when in 1703, Portugal came into the Alliance, and insisted upon being given military support, security was needed for the army passing between England and the Tagus. The Portuguese alliance imposed this new burden on the fleet; but it gave a fruitful compensation in throwing Lisbon open to the fleet as a base. The failure at Cadiz was thus, at least in part, redeemed.

Though these general conceptions governed the naval strategy throughout 1702 and 1703, it was only when Marlborough's master hand assumed control in 1704 that a real co-ordination between the land and sea forces was effected. The part which it was intended that the sea should play in that campaign which ended with the glorious success at Blenheim was that of producing a great diversion of the enemy's military forces. Of the many spots on the coast which offered opportunities for attack from the sea none offered such far-reaching results as Toulon. Help might be given to the disaffected Cevennois, to the Catalans, to the Imperialists in Sicily and the Adriatic, or alarms raised on the coast of France, but the capture of the great French naval base was far more important than any of these. It could only be effective with the help of Savoy, a recent and

always an unstable partner in the Grand Alliance. But the Duke of Savoy refused to act and the attempt could not be made. The Mediterranean fleet, after unsuccessful endeavours to bring the enemy fleet to battle and to raise the Catalans, dropped unexpectedly on Gibraltar and captured it. The seriousness of the loss was at once recognised in Paris. The Toulon fleet was ordered to recover the Rock. It sailed and the fleets met off Malaga in nearly equal strength and fought a battle, tactically indecisive but strategically decisive; for the allies were left in possession of their conquest. The subsequent combined efforts of France and Spain to recapture this vital position withdrew great numbers of their troops from other theatres and thus the capture operated also as a valuable diversion.

The battle of Malaga, like that of La Hogue, brought the struggle between France and the allies for command at sea to a close. Commerce warfare by France took the place of fleet warfare. The allies, with Lisbon as repairing base, could now winter in the Mediterranean and permanent, in place of intermittent, control of the sea could be maintained. The strategical question of the following year was that of the manner in which this command could be exploited. The demands for the fleet's help were numerous. Savoy asked

for its services on the Riviera, the Emperor for its support of his campaign in the Two Sicilies, the Austrian claimant to the Spanish throne demanded that it should assist to create a rising of the Catalan peoples, who were believed to be in his favour; the eyes in London—among them those of Marlborough—were on Toulon: but Savoy still refused to take an active part in that attempt and the Emperor, blind in the pursuit of his own territorial aggrandisement, would not spare even a corporal's guard for a purpose which would have caused the Neapolitan provinces to fall into his hands almost without a blow. In the end an army was set to Catalonia to assist in the conquest of Spain in favour of King Charles. It made its beginning by the capture of Barcelona.

From 1705 onwards England became deeply committed in two military theatres—Spain and Flanders; but while sea command was the essential foundation to the war in the Peninsula, it was not in its power to achieve victory there. The dissensions between the military commanders of the allied forces, the sympathy of the greater part of the Spanish people for the French claimant, and the skill of the French commanders which penned the allied armies within narrow limits in Catalonia and Portugal, were the determining elements. Although the struggle was to continue for several

years, Spain was actually lost in 1706. But the resounding victory of Ramillies in May of that year decided the fate of Flanders. France now found herself on the defensive in that part, while Italy was freed from the French danger by the victories of Savoy in the Alps.

In the beginning of 1707 the French armies, still very powerful, lay behind a great series of fortified lines. The problem before the British ministers was how the war should now be conducted. Should those lines be stormed, or should military operations be confined to holding the positions which had been gained and making an offensive at sea to wear the French down by economic pressure? Or again, should an effort be made to recover what had been lost in Spain? Or was a new offensive possible in some other part?

Marlborough wished to return to the scheme of the capture of Toulon. The Emperor and Savoy, supported by the allied fleets, should invade Provence, destroy the French fleet at Toulon and follow this up with an invasion. The resultant advantages would be far-reaching and not military only. The destruction of the fleet in Toulon would set free most of the allied ships now engaged upon watching it, who could then undertake more vigorous measures against the enemy's treasure

and his trade, and also—and this was becoming urgent—give a more effective protection to the trade of the allies which was suffering severely in consequence of the introduction of a fierce French squadronal and privateer attack upon their shipping.

This design, so brilliantly conceived, failed, mainly through the stubborn preoccupation of the Emperor with his own interests, whereby imperial troops were not available in time. Toulon held out. One advantage was, however, gained. To save their men-of-war from capture the French sank them in the harbour, and though some were afterwards raised, nearly all were ruined by their immersion or by the strains on their hulls while being refloated. As a result the fleet ceased to exist as an organised force, and this enabled a welcome addition to be made to the British convoys and cruisers engaged upon defending the much harried shipping.

The growth and strength of the defence in home waters now had its usual result of tending to drive the enemy commerce attack farther afield. Such losses were inflicted by the enemy on the trade of the Northern colonies and the West Indies as to cause its suspension for some period. Hence a revival arose for a demand for an offensive against the French islands in the West in order

to destroy the enemy squadrons and their resources; but as all the available troops were required for service in Spain and in Flanders, none could be spared for this purpose. Important as that West Indian trade was, it was more important to continue the naval co-operation with our allies in the Mediterranean and to maintain command in home waters.

Although the economic effort was thus regarded as subsidiary to the main operations, it was never lost sight of. Whenever news was received of the impending sailing of a treasure fleet, dispositions were made with the object of intercepting it; and those squadrons of heavy ships in the West Indies whose initial purpose was defensive, in that their principal object was to guard the trade and the islands, were also on the constant look out for the Spanish flotas. Opportunities of falling upon them were few, for the flotas were held up in harbour by threat of capture. But one considerable success was achieved by a squadron under Commodore Wager, which destroyed a part of a treasure fleet carrying some £15,000,000 worth of bullion. A remark of Lord Sunderland's gives some indication of the contemporary outlook upon the influence of the treasure fleets. He expected the blow to be fatal through depriving France of "the use of their last resources for carrying on the

war". This expectation was, however, doomed to be disappointed.

A bad harvest in France in 1707, followed by an exceptionally hard winter in 1708 which destroyed much of the autumn-sown grain, caused great distress and made it necessary for France, normally self-supporting in corn, to import grain. This suggested a modification in the strategy of 1709. In the spring of that year the situation in Flanders was apparently at a deadlock, for the French army lay behind a heavily armed line of fortresses, attack upon which must be costly, and even the result doubtful. But it might also be unnecessary. France, now in the grip of hunger and great distress, might be brought to readiness for peace without any further military operations by the final pressure of cutting off the imported grain. Hence instructions were issued, and dispositions of ships made in the North Sea, Channel and Mediterranean, to intercept all ships bound for France carrying corn. The corn was not declared as contraband and it was intended that the cargoes should be bought so that the neutrals should not suffer. At this juncture this was felt to be the most effective aid which the maritime Powers could render to the common cause. This is indicated in the words of the instructions of 20 April 1709: "Her Majesty judging it to be of

the highest importance to her affairs *as well as those of all her Allies*, to distress the enemy as much as possible by taking the most effectual measures for preventing them from receiving such supplies....” The Danes were asked to forbid the carriage of grain and enquiry was made as to how far they would be prepared to forbid the carriage to “ports other than those which are far distant from their [i.e. the enemy’s] armies and magazines”; a concession indicating that, although it was desired to stop the supply of corn to the whole people, the lesser step of preventing it from reaching the armed forces might be accepted.

The milder measure of purchasing the grain was not, however, long maintained, and the Government, following the Elizabethan precedent, declared all supplies of corn to be contraband. Though many captures were then made, the French, tightening their belts, withstood this blockade, and the war went on both in Flanders and Spain. In the Peninsula, events went steadily against the allies who, both outnumbered and outgeneralled, only maintained a precarious hold in Catalonia in 1710, and that they were able to do even this was entirely due to the fact that they were able to receive supplies of food by sea under the protection of the British fleet.

Although no sustained major effort was made



against the treasure fleets in the concluding years of the war, since the navy was so fully occupied with its duties in the Mediterranean and in defence of its commerce and many scattered positions on the colonial coast against the energetic attacks of French squadrons and privateers, many minor endeavours were made to intercept the flotas and galleons. But the difficulties of maintaining a blockade of the ports in the Spanish Indies from which they sailed, and of falling upon them once they gained open waters, were such that no successes were obtained. Nevertheless, as in the Elizabethan wars, the movements of the treasure were held up for long periods, and the risks of sailing in large convoys proved so great that the ships were sailed in small bodies which, being less easy to intercept, brought home the bulk of the treasure in safety. Possibly the demonstrations of joy in Paris and in Cadiz when these arrivals occurred lend colour to the views of those who held that the treasure was a vital issue, and that the Spanish silver and gold were in truth the essential raw materials of the war. Thus St Simon records that the arrival of a treasure fleet worth forty millions of livres in 1712 was awaited "avec autant d'impatience que de crainte. L'Espagne en avait un extrême besoin, le commerce languissait, le désordre était prêt de se mettre." Specie

had disappeared from circulation and plate was being melted down to keep the armies in the field.<sup>1</sup>

There seems indeed ground for the belief that the French military effort was suffering from financial stringency. This was certainly a view held in London. The revival of the efforts against the flotas in 1707 was largely due to the conviction that the King of France was short of money both to pay his troops and replace his losses of raw material; while in Paris, the French Minister of Finance in the same year told his King that he could not promise to find money to pay the army for another year's campaign. The revenues of 1708 had already been forestalled, credit was unobtainable, taxation had reached its limits. "It would be better", he said, "to make peace if it could be had from the allies on any reasonable terms than to continue so disastrous a war."<sup>2</sup>

Whether specie possessed the importance attached to it both in London and Paris is a question for the economist. Regarded in its strategical aspect, it is not to be doubted that its complete stoppage could not have been effected without either weakening the fleet which was the sole support of the allies in the Mediterranean, or reducing the scale of defence of the trade which

<sup>1</sup> St Simon, *Memoirs*, Vol. iv *passim*.

<sup>2</sup> Lavissee, *Histoire de France*, Vol. vii, Book II, chap. ii, p. 108.

was the other means of support of the allied cause.

Although the complete stoppage of specie was not possible, the economic pressure resulting from the reduction of French trade was considerable. Even in 1715 the lack of currency was still stopping work and reducing both production and consumption. "Riots broke out for food, not only among the civil population but even in the army. Factories were languishing and closed. Fields were deserted, for the land lay waste for want of manure and agricultural implements, and of the stock which had perished in 1709, and houses were falling into ruin."<sup>1</sup>

One instance, and one only, of England's attempting to extend her possessions oversea occurred during this war. Canada was, as it had been in the previous war, the objective, and for the same reasons—the security of the North American colonies, not the expansion of the Empire. The Northern colonists, who had continually suffered depredations on their towns and shipping from the French colony, urged that this particular danger, with its equally perpetual financial drain for the purposes of defence, should now be brought to an end by ejecting the French from Canada. Representations to the Home

<sup>1</sup> Martin, *Histoire de France*, Vol. xvii, pp. 110-11.

Government were made to this effect by the colony in 1708 and 1709, but in neither year could the Government afford to divert any force from the European theatre for that purpose. When the Tory party, who had throughout urged the policy of oversea warfare, came into power, they approved the despatch of an army of 6000 men for the purpose, in opposition to the advice of Marlborough, who strongly deprecated the withdrawal of so many men from Flanders. The attempt to ascend the St Lawrence with this force was made in 1711. It failed, partly through the common fault of so many expeditions—delay and want of organisation—partly through a want of resolution on the part of the naval commanders. But this solitary expedition, on a scale which did not materially affect the continental campaign, furnishes no ground for that accusation so frequently made by the detractors of England that she neglects her allies in order to serve her own selfish imperialistic ends. Such as it was, it was an attempt to defend the Northern colonists, made at the urgent request of the colonists themselves, to put an end to a series of encroachments which kept their people constantly in arms, took them away from their civil pursuits, prevented the quiet development of their industry, and burdened them with expense.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE WAR OF THE AUSTRIAN SUCCESSION

WHEN, in November 1740, the King of Prussia committed what Macaulay called the "great crime of violating his plighted oath, of robbing the ally he was bound to defend, and of plunging Europe into a long, bloody and desolating war", Great Britain had already been at war for rather over a year with Spain. The quarrel arose out of injuries said to have been done to British traders and seamen in the West Indies. No more need here be said of that contest than that the means by which Britain sought to compel compliance upon Spain and force her to desist from her depredations was by the stoppage of Spanish trade. The principal objectives were the treasure fleets, as they had been at all the earlier times, and, in addition, the great Spanish centres of commerce in the West Indies. "By our navy alone", said Walpole, "we cannot propose to force them to a peace. We must attack them upon land at some place or other and for this purpose we must have a sufficient land force." Hence an army was sent to capture either Carthagená or Havana, the two

most important commercial and naval ports. That army had left England only a bare month before Frederick of Prussia made his treacherous attack upon Silesia. How his evil example found ready imitators, Bavaria claiming the Imperial crown and the Queen of Spain laying pretensions to various territories in Italy, are familiar matters of general history.

Two questions presented themselves to the British statesmen; should Great Britain intervene in favour of the Queen of Hungary? And if she did, what form should her aid take?

There was an appreciable body in Parliament in favour of non-intervention on the grounds that neither British honour nor British interests were involved; that the quarrel was one of a purely local nature between the Queen of Hungary and the King of Prussia; that the balance of power was unaffected by this quarrel, but that, even if the balance were upset, no harm could come to Great Britain so long as she maintained her supremacy at sea. Among other arguments it was said that if England did intervene, each European ruler would pursue his own acquisitive ends, and the burden of the defence of the Low Countries would be left to Britain; whereas if she should abstain, the other European states would be bound to unite in self-defence against the common

danger of a France dominant over a dismembered Empire. On narrower lines the City interests laid stress upon the taxation which would result from war, the effect of which would be to ruin trade. Such, in general, were the major features of the case against intervention.

Government considered intervention to be essential both for honour and security. Great Britain, said Walpole, had given her word to preserve the integrity of the Empire, and the fact that other Powers had violated theirs afforded no reason for her to follow their example. To defend Austria against dismemberment was essential for England's security: the only Power which threatened England was France, and it would be impossible to create any confederacy against France without a strong Austria. If France should once acquire an established superiority in Europe, it would lie in her power to close the ports of Portugal, Italy and the Baltic to British commerce, to crush Holland, and to possess such great internal resources that she would be able in time to outbuild Britain at sea. Britain's turn to be conquered would inevitably follow as soon as France was superior at sea: she would be exposed to invasion, which her weaker navy would be unable to prevent; she would lose her trade and her colonies.

Parliament was convinced that the fate of

Britain could not be dissociated from the fate of the continent. Intervention was essential for her own security. What form, then, should her help take? She was engaged by treaty to support the Queen of Hungary with 12,000 troops in the Netherlands, but the Queen's cause was also threatened in the Mediterranean, where Spanish armies were preparing to invade Italy across the sea. A squadron was therefore ordered to Gibraltar. Cruising squadrons were already acting against Spanish trade, but this action was kept definitely subordinate to the control of the military routes in the Gulf of Lions and, at a later date, in the Adriatic also.

While England thus went to the help of the Queen of Hungary, France gave her support to the Bavarian claimant; but though on opposite sides, the two countries were not at war with each other. Expectations that France might take the opportunity to attempt the seizure of the Low Countries caused ministers to increase the military force in the Netherlands to 16,000 men in November 1742—an increase the need for which was criticised in Parliament; the precaution was defended on the grounds of the uncertainty of France's attitude and of the fact that if she should once get possession of the Low Countries "England would not long have reason to boast"



of her superiority at sea and her immunity from invasion.

This condition of veiled warfare—or as it would be called to-day “non-belligerency”—continued until March 1744, when Louis XV decided to invade and annex the Austrian Netherlands, disregarding the warning of Marshal Noailles that this would infallibly lead to open war with England and that such a war would be long, costly and hazardous to France. In great secrecy he prepared a surprise invasion from Dunkirk; but the secret of the preparations leaked out in time, the squadron intended to escort the army was dispersed by the Channel fleet, and war was declared.

Thus in March 1744 Great Britain, allied to the Queen of Hungary and the King of Sardinia, was opposed to France and Spain. A Dutch auxiliary squadron acted with the British fleet though it never reached the strength laid down by treaty. On paper, the opposing navies were of approximately equal strength, but as the two enemy powers each pursued their own national ends they lost the advantages their numerical strength would have given them.

The controversy between the advocates of “continental” and “maritime” strategy again arose in this war. The arguments for a purely

naval and colonial strategy were much on the same lines as those for non-intervention. The interests of a trading nation should not be sacrificed to an expensive continental war: the most effective aid Britain could give her allies was to sweep the enemy's commerce from the seas, capture the sources of his wealth in the colonies and so cripple his military efforts, protect the Queen of Hungary's Italian provinces from Spanish invasion over the sea and destroy the naval power of the two enemies. "The most effectual way", said one speaker, "to assist our allies will always be to prosecute the war by sea and in America... We may conquer from our enemies, they can conquer nothing from us, and our trade will improve by the total extinction of theirs."<sup>1</sup>

But the Netherlands was the crux. Honour demanded that Britain should fulfil her obligations and interest marched hand in hand with honour. Britain, it was repeated, could never afford to run the risk of allowing Europe to fall under the heel of France. If France were to hold the Netherlands, and Spain held Sicily and Lombardy, the allied Bourbon Powers would be a match for Britain at sea, particularly if they were joined, as they might then be, by Holland. Anticipating Napoleon's

<sup>1</sup> *Parliamentary History*, Vol. XIII, p. 90.

“Continental System”, one speaker said: “They might perhaps by threats or money get all the ports of the Baltic except the Russian shut against us, and in this case I should be glad to know how we could carry on even a naval war against the House of Bourbon, assisted by the Dutch. We might . . . fit out a most powerful navy because all our merchant ships except those in the West and East Indies trade would of course be laid up in our harbours: but as neither the French nor Spaniards would then have occasion to be at the expense of keeping up land armies, they might in a year or two be able, with the assistance of the Dutch, to provide a navy at least equal if not superior to ours.” Conquests in America would be useless if the enemy gained control of the continent, for the colonies would be reconquered in Europe. Their temporary loss would not cripple the enemy. “I fear”, said Lord Hardwicke, “that now America must be fought for in Europe. Whatever success we may have in the former I doubt it will always finally follow the fate of the latter.”

Hence the aid which Great Britain proceeded to render to her allies in 1744 was in four forms. An army in Flanders for the defence of the Low Countries, a fleet in the Mediterranean to help Austria and Sardinia, action at sea to injure French

trade and finance, and protection of the British commerce which furnished the subsidies without which her continental allies could not keep their armies in the field.

At no stage of the war, not even during the perilous period of the Jacobite rebellion in 1745 and 1746 when the threat of invasion was imminent, did Britain relax the assistance she was giving in the Mediterranean to the Queen of Hungary, or pursue a policy of oversea expansion at the expense of the interests of her allies. It was indeed she who had cause to complain that while she was making great efforts on behalf of her friends, they were thinking of, and acting for, themselves. Thus the Dutch, whom she was protecting, never furnished their established quota of fully equipped ships, and insisted on continuing their trade with the common enemy, carrying to his ports the ship-building materials he needed and the provisions required for his armies; while the Emperor, in his capacity as Duke of Tuscany, made shrill complaints when British cruisers arrested Tuscan vessels engaged upon what he called "the legitimate trade" of conveying corn to the armies of his own enemies.

Although colonial attack formed no part of British policy or affected British strategy during this long war, one colonial conquest was made.

When war broke out in 1744 the colonists in Massachusetts, as anxious as their predecessors to rid themselves of their aggressive Northern neighbours, sent an expedition of colonial troops under the protection of a detachment of ships from the British West Indian squadron to capture the French naval base, Louisbourg, in the approaches to the St Lawrence River. The fortress was taken. This small expedition did not deflect a man or a ship from the services of the common cause in the Mediterranean, for the colonial forces could not have been brought to Europe, and the naval squadron was only temporarily detached from the West Indies, to which it returned when the campaign ended.

This success encouraged the colonists to press, as they had pressed in 1708, for the larger venture of the expulsion of the French from Canada. At the suggestion, indeed the entreaty, of the Governor of Massachusetts, an army of 5000 men was made ready during the spring of 1746 to go to Canada in conjunction with a colonial army. This expedition never sailed. The French forestalled it, sending an army to attack Acadia and, by this offensive, forcing the British to take steps for the security of their own possessions.

Until the latter part of 1746 no clear purpose had informed the British strategy at sea, and French squadrons escorting the trade had sailed with little

interruption. Hence the economic pressure upon France had been comparatively light. Under a more energetic direction a more determined effort was then made, with a stronger offensive against the enemy's commerce. The results were felt in 1747. In May Anson intercepted a French squadron escorting a large convoy and captured the whole force; in June a great convoy of 120 sail was fallen upon and forty-eight of the ships were taken; in October a third convoy was caught by Hawke. As a result of these losses of men-of-war and merchantmen, French sea-borne commerce practically ceased to sail and it became only a matter of time when the colonies, now isolated, would fall into British hands.

What was the effect of this activity at sea upon the war as a whole? By the end of 1747 the whole of Flanders was in Marshal Saxe's hands, Holland was open to invasion through the fall of the fortress of Bergen-op-Zoom, an allied invasion of Provence had been defeated and the allies were on the defensive in Italy. Yet in spite of this favourable military situation, and of the fact that she had conquered those territories for which she had gone to war in 1744, France was so distressed that she was ready, even anxious, to discuss terms of peace. Even before the war began her internal conditions had been deplorable through the drains of her previous wars and a succession of bad

harvests: by 1748 they were far worse. Her peasantry was starving, her factories were closed, trade was at a standstill and it was difficult to see how she could continue even to pay her army. In London, too, there was, indeed, anxiety; the cost of the war was frightening the City and there were those who thought that it was a nice question whether the finances of Britain or the social structure of France would be the first to break down. Against this financial pessimism Lord Sandwich pronounced a warning. "The same belief", he said, "that England could not continue to fight because of her financial difficulties had been responsible for an undue readiness to make peace at the time of Utrecht, and the results of that unsatisfactory peace were to be seen in all the wars which had followed throughout the century." Looking at the later wars, there seems little doubt that Britain could have stood the strain far longer in 1748. Her imports and exports, though both had suffered before the attack on commerce had been mastered, now stood at practically the same height as in 1739 when the war began and were showing a steadily rising tendency; the enemy's sea trade had disappeared. Slow as Britain had been to get into her stride, she was well in it in 1748.

Why did France make a peace so little related

to her military conquests that the common saying was "*Bête comme la paix*"? Why did she surrender those conquests in Flanders for which she had entered the war as a principal in 1744? For one thing Canada was in danger. With Louisbourg in British hands the way was open for an attack up the St Lawrence; her naval base was lost, and the price she must pay for its recovery was Flanders<sup>1</sup>—a price little liked by those colonists who had effected the capture. For another, more far-reaching, she was in a state of great exhaustion, owing to the combination of a costly war on land and the loss of the means of supporting it—Trade: and the British command of the sea removed any possibility of recovery. If the Government had stood firm the effects of the economic pressure would have increased and it is possible that a peace, instead of what proved to be no more than a truce, would have been obtained. It is hardly open to doubt that if the British ministers had been able to make up their minds sooner as to how they would fight the war, and had directed the war at sea with a greater vigour and singleness of aim, the difficulties in which France found herself in 1748 would have been brought into existence sooner and more severely.

<sup>1</sup> Pitt, in a speech in November 1755, said: "It was our navy that procured the restoration of the Barrier and Flanders in the last war by making us masters of Cape Breton."



## CHAPTER V

### THE SEVEN YEARS' WAR

THE object with which Britain went to war with France, before the European conflict known as the Seven Years' War began, was confined to preventing that Power from enclosing the British colonies in North America within the narrow strip of coast between the Alleghannies and the sea, the effect of which would have been to deprive the colonies of the possibility of any further extension to the westward. Although the British colonists numbered some 2,000,000 to the Canadian 50,000<sup>1</sup>, their mutual jealousies and narrow localistic outlooks prevented them from combining in any common efforts at defence. Benjamin Franklin was alive to the danger and in 1754 tried to bring about a scheme of general defence, but his efforts failed; and it fell to the British Government in London to take the steps necessary to defend those British citizens in America who lacked the will and self-sacrifice to defend themselves.

Thus the origins of the dispute between Britain

<sup>1</sup> Basil Williams, *Life of William Pitt*, Vol. 1, p. 251.

and France were of a strictly limited and local character. France, in British eyes, was encroaching upon territory in which British colonial interests lay, and, as the local forces had proved unable to withstand those of Canada, they must be strengthened. Accordingly, a small reinforcement of 800 troops was sent to America in the spring of 1755. To this France made the formidable reply of the despatch of 3000 men under the protection of a squadron of ships of war. A British squadron, sent to stop these forces, failed to find them, but met a couple of the men-of-war which had become separated from the main body and took them (10 June 1755). The news of this fiasco reached London in mid-July: war was then inevitable.

How the coming war should be fought was now the problem. At the outset there were two schools of thought: on the one hand there were those, like the Duke of Newcastle, who saw the war in the form of a continental struggle, to be fought out on the battlefields of Europe; a war in which Britain needed allies and of which the object was the overcoming of France by military means. On the other there were those, led by Pitt, who opposed all continental operations, other than such as were necessary for the defence of the Low Countries, as fiercely as Swift and others had done in their days, and would conduct

the war wholly at sea and in America with the limited object of colonial security. Thus Pitt, in the last months of 1755, rejected the idea that Britain was in any need of help, that she had any obligations for the preservation of Hanover, or should pursue a policy of subsidies. He viewed the contest for what it was—a struggle for colonial power and safety.

It was not, however, only between France and Britain that there were then difficulties. Europe was a powder magazine, as it had been ever since Frederick of Prussia had begun his aggressions in 1740. Austria was thirsting to recover Silesia, France was in alliance with her, the many problems of the Netherlands were a source of perpetual friction. War between Britain and France might be the match setting alight to a general war, and these political factors necessarily influenced strategy.

The "continental" policy received the support of Parliament. A series of diplomatic manœuvres followed on the parts of Britain, Russia, Prussia and Austria, Britain seeking an ally who would defend Hanover, Austria one who would help her to reconquer Silesia, Prussia one to assist her to hold it. The eventual outcome of the British diplomacy was a treaty, signed with Prussia in January 1756, by which Britain, in return for

Frederick's promise to protect Hanover, would assist him against his many enemies.

In the spring of 1756 France, having completed her preparations for invading England, launched an army under cover of that threat against Minorca whose defences, in spite of the strained situation, had been completely neglected. Minorca fell—the story of the failure to relieve it is familiar. Then, because, in Pitt's words, "we had provoked before we can defend, we have neglected after provocation", disaster followed disaster. The old rivals, Austria and France, became allies, French troops triumphed in America, and Frederick precipitated war on the continent by invading Saxony.

Matters went so ill throughout 1756, owing to a total lack of a clear strategical grasp of the situation on the part of the ministry, that Pitt was called in to conduct the war. Opposed though he had been earlier to continental engagements, he now concurred in the need of honouring the treaty with Prussia; and in the view that, if Hanover were taken by France, any American conquests which Britain might make would have to be given up at the peace, as Louisbourg had been given up in 1748, in order to redeem the King's Electorate. But the principal object was plain. "The succour and preservation of America

cannot but constitute a main object of my attention and solicitude."<sup>1</sup>

Hence a strong army was sent to America and help was given to Frederick in the form in which he asked for it—an army of observation on the Rhine to keep the French in check, diversions on the French Atlantic coasts to tie down troops there and keep them away from Germany, and active operations against the French oversea in India and the colonies. One thing was refused him—a squadron in the Baltic; the whole of the British navy was needed elsewhere and even a squadron of great ships could not prevent Russian oared galleys from attacking the coasts in the Baltic and landing troops. Thus, during subsequent years, a series of expeditions was launched against Rochefort, St Malo, Cherbourg and Brest in order to contain French troops; and, if they failed to achieve all that had been expected of them, they did keep a number of the enemy from the German theatre.

Besides the military operations there was the economic war. No commercial blockade was attempted, but the main British squadrons, operating off the principal French ports, stopped the sailing of French shipping. The important colonial trade was thus brought to an end, and

<sup>1</sup> King's Speech, 2 December 1756.

in order to restore it France threw open the carriage of colonial goods to the neutrals. This was a trade normally reserved to the French flag, and the British reply to this attempt to escape from the restrictions imposed by the command of the sea was to declare that nations at war could not engage in a trade which was closed to them in peace. The "Rule of 1756" asserted that vessels engaging in such trade became incorporated in the enemy merchant marine and were thereby liable to capture. To have allowed this evasion to pass would have given France the enjoyment of all her colonial commerce, with the exception of the business of shipping, and increased the defensive strength of the French islands which were dependent on the mother country for their food. The Rule gave offence to all those neutrals who would have profited greatly from the extension to their normal commerce, and protests followed, together with threats of intervention; but the matter was one of too great importance for Britain to rescind the Rule. She could not allow her sword to be blunted by this obvious expedient. She maintained the Rule; but she made a concession to neutral rights by curbing the activities of her privateers, to the conduct of many of which objection could undoubtedly be taken.

As the war progressed the character of the

British aims extended. The incursions into the Ohio Valley were regarded as something more than a mere local affair: they were the expression of a general policy of aggression, manifested in India by the activities of Duplex and Bussy, in the Mediterranean by the capture of Minorca with its threat to the trade in that sea. It was held that it was necessary to bring this aggressive policy to an end. There could be but one guarantee of permanent peace and that was the total extinction of the naval power of France. Colonies and Canadian fisheries were essential factors in this power, hence they must be taken. The scope of the British operations therefore extended: and as Frederick's difficulties were growing, the need to help him grew also. More British troops went to Germany.

Opposition to the continental war made itself felt in 1760. In that year a pamphlet appeared in which the objections to undertaking operations in support of Prussia were reasoned. The true policy for Britain was to concentrate the whole of her effort upon "disabling France hereafter from raising a maritime power which could be formidable to this country...and the course by which this could be achieved is by seizing the enemy's islands and making ourselves masters of that trade". France might dominate the courts

of Europe but this could only cause all the German states to draw together and oppose her, and even if they should fail to do so, Britain would not be endangered. "Let the Empire suffer great armies to march from the Rhine to the utmost Danube and pillage every city from Mannheim to Belgrade, all these cannot build them a single frigate to annoy our coast with."<sup>1</sup> The writer ridiculed the claim that the campaign in Germany diverted French strength from the sea to the land; contrariwise, he said, it diverted British strength from its own element, the sea, and crippled British naval offensives. "It is the duty of every wise state in making the choice of the province which it shall send its troops to act in, to consider where it shall make war to the greatest advantage; where it is itself strongest and its enemy weakest; where it has itself least to lose and the enemy most; and where its victories are like to have the best effect and soonest bring its enemies to peace." That "province" for Britain was the sea and the colonies. Subsidies and the sending of British armies to the continent dissipated Britain's wealth and she would be left at the end of the war so burdened with debt that she would be unable even to afford to maintain the navy her security needed. France, on the other hand, would still possess

<sup>1</sup> Cf. pp. 15, 44, 48, 102 for different opinions on this matter.



those colonies which were not only the source of her wealth and military strength but also constituted the reason for her needing a navy for their protection: she would therefore build a navy which otherwise would be unbuilt.

The kernel of the arguments may be said to lie in the assumptions that Europe would, and could, combine against a conquering France, that a France with the resources of Europe at her command could not out-build Britain at sea, and that the closing of the ports of Europe to British trade would not occur or, if it should, would matter little.

Events, however, were showing that Britain's efforts in Germany were not preventing her from commanding the sea, ejecting France from India, and seizing colonies in the Indies and Africa. Only in Germany was there defeat, and it was possible that Frederick's losses would have to be bought back by the sacrifice of some of the British conquests. Whatever might be the arguments in the abstract against the continental operations, in the solid realm of facts as they were, it was necessary to keep Frederick on his feet if the aims of the war were to be attained.

Although France had lost Canada and many of her islands by 1761 and her sea trade—and with it her credit—was severely reduced, she was still

very far from being under any financial necessity to make peace. Money was not wanting to continue the war in Germany, where her army was nearly double that of her enemies. The sea warfare had not been decisive; against a country with such great internal resources it could not be: but it had limited her power of making war at sea as well as on land—thus, Choiseul had written in 1760 that the King's finances would not enable him to send succours to Canada. Economic warfare against France could thus wound and weaken but could not kill. Against Spain, however, it was capable of producing greater results. Seeing the prospects of recovering Gibraltar and of redressing some other grievances, Spain began to assume a threatening attitude in 1761 but could not risk action until her sinews of war, the treasure from the West, was in her hands. To deter or disable her, Pitt proposed to stop the *flota*: but his Cabinet colleagues, for reasons partly factious, partly pacific and nervous, would not take this decisive step, hoping vainly that Spain would do nothing. As soon, however, as the treasure was safely within her ports Spain's intentions became plain and unmistakable and war followed. The economic weapon proved effective against her. A British expedition captured Havana and, with the loss of that pivotal point of Spanish wealth,

Spain's desires melted away and the extensive French plans for a joint invasion of England came to an end. Peace followed shortly after.

Reviewed in the broadest terms the strategy of the successful years of this war—1757 to 1761—may be expressed thus. The principal political object was the security of the North American colonies. The means by which the attainment of that object was sought was the conquest of Canada. For that purpose strong British and colonial armies invaded that country. As the conquest might have been nullified by the possible counterstroke of the conquest of Hanover, Prussian help was arranged for its defence, and this help was calculated to serve the further purpose of diverting French resources from the sea and the colonial theatre to the land. The form of the help was an army, partly British partly subsidised, in Germany, and diversionary attacks on the enemy coasts. No attempt was made to reduce France by blockade, but every effort possible was made to injure her by stopping the movements of her shipping and of her rich colonial trade in order to reduce her ability to continue the war.

## CHAPTER VI

### THE WAR OF THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION

ECONOMIC pressure played so small a part in determining the outcome of the war of the American Revolution that no lengthy examination of the question "economic action or military strategy" in this war is needed. There are, however, some aspects of the economic problem and its influence upon strategy which may be briefly noted.

When, towards the end of 1774, Parliament had unhappily decided to undertake coercive measures against the colonists, the form which those measures should take came under consideration. The population of the Northern colonists numbered about three million and there were at that time no more than seven regiments of infantry in the centre of disaffection, Massachusetts; a very small number with which to exercise coercion upon so numerous a people. In England, too, there was a body of opinion which considered that England had no right to lay taxes on the colonists, and also another which, though believing in the right, doubted the equity. Among

these last was Lord Barrington.<sup>1</sup> Though he was opposed to coercion he did not resign office, but he expressed his views as to how that coercion should be applied towards the colonies—"one of which seems to be in actual rebellion and many more on the verge of it".

Barrington was strongly opposed to the use of military force. He doubted whether all the troops in North America could bring the people under subjection even though they might succeed in overcoming the fighting forces in pitched battle. If conquered, the population would have to be held down by armies and fortresses, all maintained at a ruinous cost. Military action meant civil war with all its deplorable results; and it was not necessary: for "the country can be reduced first by distress then to obedience by our marine totally interrupting all commerce and fishery and even seizing all the ships in the ports with very little expense and less bloodshed". A few frigates or sloops would stop the trade of the other states, a few ships of the line would guard against foreign interference. All the troops in Boston should be withdrawn, as their presence stimulated ill-feeling and might be the cause of a clash; and they brought money into the colony. Troops in other colonies, furnished by England to guard against

<sup>1</sup> Secretary at War, 1755-61; reappointed 1765.

Indians, should also be sent away—to Canada, Nova Scotia or Florida—and the burden of defence thrown upon the pockets of the colonists; so, “the colonies will in a few months feel their distress, and their spirits, not animated by any successes on their part or violence on ours, will sink”. Concessions could then be made and “if we are wise we shall for the future abstain from all future taxation”.

The exercise of economic pressure did not involve a very great effort if no other operations were undertaken. There were five principal focal points of trade—off Boston and Newport, from Newport to Rhode Island, the approaches to New York, between the capes of the Delaware and in the entrance of the Chesapeake; there were lesser ports, but the bulk of the commerce was within these areas and an effective blockade of them could hardly fail to be felt by the whole people.

The view of those who differed from Barrington was that the disturbances were no more than the rioting of a faction, to be put down as it would be in Spitalfields or Leeds. To remove the troops was to condone riot, abdicate the duty of governing, and expose the loyal folk to injury. So, as at other times, there was a “disputing of your generals”. Lord Sandwich doubted whether the

navy was in a state to perform the task, Lord Weymouth was for crushing resistance with an army that did not exist, Lord North hovered between military action and "guileful fair words". The resulting action was a compromise: an army was to put down the resistance, trade and intercourse with the colonies "now in active rebellion" was forbidden, and the naval forces were to enforce the isolation, protect the movements of the army and guard the trade against the attacks at sea which were to be expected from a brave and enterprising maritime people. The primary duty was to secure the military communications; blockade was secondary and could only be so since the number of small vessels needed were wanting. "Your Lordship must not be surprised at seeing so long a list of entries both inward and outward at Philadelphia, as if the Delaware were quite open and free from cruisers; *the whole of the frigates on this station are not equal to the wants of the army.*"<sup>1</sup> Even with so partial an attempt to stop the sea traffic the effects were felt. "The Non-Intercourse and Embargo Acts inflicted privations both military and domestick which would probably have caused that war to terminate differently but for French aid. Even provisions became so scarce and dear

<sup>1</sup> Admiral Graves to Lord Sandwich.

that it was nearly as difficult to feed as to clothe a small army."<sup>1</sup>

The war may be divided into three phases. In the first, between April 1775 and March 1776, the military forces were engaged upon what was, virtually, police action against Boston, accompanied by Acts to restrain the trade of certain states and prohibit the export of warlike stores to America. Foreign Powers were asked to prohibit exports of arms, and both the Dutch, in March 1775, and the Danes, in October 1775, issued prohibitions accordingly. But these proved of no avail. Treaties were ignored in favour of the profits of a highly lucrative business in these goods, which went to the French and Dutch islands: and the Northern colonies, which were the normal source from which the neutral islands obtained their food, were able to threaten to refuse foodstuffs unless arms and food munitions were sent in exchange.

The second phase was one in which attempts were made to reconquer the revolting states. One of the most essential factors in the colonial situation was the need of gunpowder. Since this could not be produced within the country, it must be imported. Hence arrangements were made whereby a firm was established in France,

<sup>1</sup> Sears, *Jefferson and the Embargo*, p. 130.



with French and Spanish capital, to produce munitions and send them to the rebels. The importance of the powder supplies cannot be overstated. "If it had not been for the great quantities of imported powder and saltpetre before the Saratoga campaign the revolution would have broken down long before that time."<sup>1</sup> The fact of this want was recognised, though perhaps its full significance was not realised, in London, and in January 1776 it was known powder was being sent in great quantities to St Eustatia. "Between that place and North America", wrote the King, "we ought to cover the sea with vessels to disappoint them in this essential article for carrying on the next campaign." Neutral powers were told that vessels engaging in this illicit trade would be seized. But neither Acts, Proclamations nor prohibitions could be effective without an adequate number of small vessels to enforce their observance, and this the navy did not possess. To intercept the flood of supplies, and at the same time attend to the wants of the army, protect its transports and troopships, and defend the trade, was beyond the powers of the neglected sea forces of England. Hence powder continued to pour into the country and to nourish the operations

<sup>1</sup> Bemis, *American Secretaries of State* . . . , Vol. 1, pp 8, 9 and *passim*.

of the colonists; and the second phase of the war ended with the surrender of Burgoyne at Saratoga in October 1777.

The civil war had been eagerly watched in France, for the opportunity it offered to dismember the victors of 1763 was obvious. In the eyes of M. de Vergennes, if France had had time to repair her losses, Providence had dictated this moment for the humiliation of England and her reduction to a second-class Power: and he had, from the early stages of the war, endeavoured to persuade Spain to prepare for combined action against England. The navies of the two Powers<sup>1</sup> would fall little if at all short of her's and attacks could be delivered on British trade, on Jamaica, and on England by invasion across the Channel. Spain's reward was to be Gibraltar, Minorca and Portugal. But Spain, hard hit by a recent reverse in Africa, was not in a position to begin a war.

The defeat at Saratoga convinced London that it was now impossible to overcome the colonist's resistance by land. To do so, said Lord Amherst, would need another 30,000 men and that number did not exist. Britain should now abandon her offensive on land, concentrating her efforts upon the defence of Canada, Nova Scotia, Rhode Island,

<sup>1</sup> France was credited by Vergennes with 70 ships of the line and Spain 63, which it was hoped soon to raise to 100.

New York, the Floridas and if possible Philadelphia, making her offensive at sea against the colonists' military supplies from Europe and their trade. In Paris the news decided the ministry that the moment had come to act and war followed her recognition of the independence of the United States. For Britain this changed the object of the war, which now ceased to be the overthrow of the military resistance in America. In the words of the instructions to Lord Howe: "The contest in America being a secondary consideration, the principal object must now be the distressing France and defending his Majesty's possessions against any hostile attempt."

Thus the army was now on the defensive in America; it needed the support of the fleet. The armies of the States no less needed the help of the French navy for their own offensive. The West Indies became the principal theatre in the struggle between Britain and France, for there each could attack the other where it was vulnerable. The financial condition of France was bad—Turgot had said money could only be found for a short war—and her external trade was important. Of her total imports and exports some 30 and 35 % respectively were derived from her West Indian possessions.<sup>1</sup> On the side of Britain, the property

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Lieut. P. Auphan, "Les communications entre la France et l'Amérique pendant la guerre de l'Indépendance américaine", *Revue Maritime*, March and April 1925.

in the islands was computed to be worth thirty millions sterling, the annual trade with Europe, Africa and the Indies was the largest branch of her commerce, and the shipping and seamen formed an important element in national strength. "If we should lose our sugar islands", wrote the King in 1779, "it will be impossible to raise money to continue the war."

In 1779 Spain, making profession of a long catalogue of grievances of a kind with which the modern technique of aggressors has made us familiar<sup>1</sup> but with the real object of recovering Gibraltar and Minorca, joined France. Britain then called upon Holland to come to her aid in accordance with the treaty of 1678, and to desist from protecting the transport of naval stores to France. "What object can be more important, more indispensable, than that of depriving the enemy of any materials which may enable them to redouble their efforts during the war? And how can a protection of those materials be reconciled to the alliances so often renewed between the nations?" was asked. But the Dutch would neither give the promised aid nor relinquish the rich profits they were enjoying. Their shipping continued to carry goods to the enemy, and the island of St Eustatia flourished as a depot for goods going to America and to the French fleet.

<sup>1</sup> *Vide* her Memorandum of 16 June 1779.

Britain's need of a navy strong enough to meet her enemies without dependence upon allies upon whom there could never be reliance was thus brought home to her. She now had a formidable situation to meet, opposed to the fleets of France and Spain, together with swarms of American privateers in the Carribean, the British seas, off the coasts of Africa and Portugal and at St Helena, the port of call of the homeward bound East Indiamen.

Faced with such a naval coalition, it became of exceptional importance to prevent the enemies from obtaining the materials for building and rigging their ships. These goods she therefore declared contraband of war. At once those neutrals who had these stores to sell, and those engaged in carrying them, raised protests. Commercialism, in the words of Sir Francis Pigott, posed as Philosophy and appeal was made to an imaginary "natural law" entitling a neutral to supply a belligerent with these particular goods. Under the leadership of the Empress Catherine the Northern Powers proceeded in 1780 to form what was called an "Armed Neutrality" to enforce this right. The history of belligerent rights is a long record of inconsistency, the attitudes of nations towards their rights changing according to their temporary situation and the immediate advantages

to be derived from enforcing or resisting the naval power in the exercise of its strength. In this case France, who had enunciated doctrines in 1681 far more severe than those of Britain—doctrines repeated in 1778—at once veered round and proclaimed her adherence to “Free ships Free goods”. This philosophy of opportunism in which principles have no place, and ethics are subordinated to immediate advantages, reappears in every war, and we see nations who, as allies of Britain have participated in, and profited from, the strongest measures against enemy trade, and have even pressed her to exert greater rigour, denying, when neutrals, the existence of such rights and taking steps to oppose them in order to profit from the rich harvest that is created by the needs of war.

The general tenor of the British replies to the many Powers who thus proposed to alter the ancient Law of Nations in order to suit their strategy or their pockets was to the effect that Britain adhered to the old-established customs. Thus the Secretary of State informed the ambassador at St Petersburg that “it is established by the concurrent opinion of the best writers on the subject and by the constant uniform decisions of, I believe, every Court of Admiralty in Europe, that according to the Law of Nations the goods

of an enemy, whether contraband or not, when found on board a neutral ship are legal prize”.

In 1780 intercepted despatches disclosed that Holland had been engaged in negotiations with the American States to conclude a treaty of friendship and commerce. This, coming hard on the heels of her refusal to fulfil her treaty obligations to Britain, her open encouragement of the use of St Eustatia as a supply depot for the enemy, and her throwing her ports open to the enemy's privateers for refitting and disposing of their prizes, brought matters to a head. An open enemy was to be preferred to a “non-belligerent” who was helping the enemy in a most vital manner, and Britain declared war. Holland appealed to the Northern League for help but here she was sadly deceived; for they were as practised dialecticians, and as able in avoiding inconvenient commitments, as she. The “Armed Neutrality”, they replied, concerned neutrals only: Holland was no longer a neutral and to help her would be a departure from neutrality. To be sure it was very unfortunate for Holland, but the British complaints all referred to events anterior to Holland's approach to the League and therefore did not concern it. So, in brief, as she had evaded her obligations to Britain, her friends found excuses for not helping her. Dutch trade was at once

brought to a standstill, the lucrative trade she had refused to forgo ceased entirely, and the running sore of St Eustatia was healed by its capture in February 1781.<sup>1</sup>

Though the idea of reconquest of the colonies had been given up, military operations in America continued in the hope that the initial revolutionary ardour might be cooled by the long struggle and the resulting privations. In spite of the victory at Saratoga and the arrival of French squadrons in 1778 and 1779 and of 5000 troops in 1780, Washington was anxious in 1781. "If France delays timely aid", he wrote in April, "it will avail us nothing if she attempt it hereafter. We are at the end of our tether, and now or never must our deliverance come." Deliverance was on its way. In March a great fleet of twenty-five of the line escorting 100 transports had left Brest without opposition owing to the British preoccupation with the relief of Gibraltar. Its presence in the American seas gave the enemy the superiority at sea through which the surrender of Cornwallis

<sup>1</sup> The strength of the fleets was now approximately as follows:

Heavy ships	British
64 guns and over	112
60 and 50 guns	



at Yorktown was brought about in the following October. "Your Excell<sup>y</sup> will have observed", wrote Washington to Admiral de Grasse, "that whatever efforts are made by the land armies, the Navy must have the casting vote in the present contest."

The navy had also the casting vote in the West Indies, but though many British islands fell into French hands this was not solely due to the British inferiority at sea. The supineness or even greed of planters who failed to make efforts in their own defence was an element in their loss. The principal islands, Jamaica, Barbados and Antigua, however, were held, and the decisive blows hoped for by France were lacking; while at the same time the financial drain of the war was telling upon her. Could she not strike an effective blow elsewhere? General de Bussy, an officer with a distinguished career in India, suggested that an expedition there, in co-operation with the Princes opposed to Britain, might deprive Britain of those establishments from whence she derived her chief resources and that this would "compel the Court of London to ask for peace". This hope was disappointed. Bodies of French troops and ships bound for India were intercepted in the Bay and the British squadron in the Indian seas held its own against superior force and the skill of a most brilliant

commander, Admiral Suffren. Finally all hopes of a decision in the West Indies were dissipated by the victory of the British fleet off the Saints in April 1782. France, wearied and financially depressed, was ready to come to terms without the overthrow of Britain to which Vergennes had looked forward; Spain had recovered Minorca but not Gibraltar and, like France, was ruined in her trade; Holland, a country with no other resources than her seaborne commerce, was even more severely hit; and peace followed shortly.

Britain had lost her American colonies. Politically, as that most understanding American historian Mr G. L. Beer has said, "it was upon the rock of imperial defence that the loosely constructed unseaworthy old Empire shattered itself". That is true, but strategically the loss was due to the manner in which the ministers employed their strength, dissipating their efforts, undertaking extensive military operations beyond the country's power which committed its navy to tasks which prevented it from exercising a command at sea which, if it might not have compelled compliance upon the disaffected fellow-subjects in America, would have prevented that military aid from reaching them which decided the struggle.

## CHAPTER VII

### THE WARS OF THE FRENCH REVOLUTION AND EMPIRE, 1793-1815

IT was a reluctant and unprepared Britain that found itself at war with France in February 1793. In August 1791 Grenville had said that he looked forward to a long period of peace and unexampled prosperity; in February 1792 Pitt, forestalling confidently fifteen years of peace, had reduced the votes for the army and navy and abolished the Hessian subsidy; in September and November 1792, when France invaded successively Savoy and Flanders, Pitt still stood aside. When the storm broke and France declared war on Britain and Holland in February 1793, ministers, said Richard Burke, who had hoped by negotiation to avoid the crisis, "found themselves over head and ears in the war when we were only beginning to prepare"—a situation not uncommon in British affairs.

Since April 1792 France had then been at war with Austria and Prussia. The causes<sup>1</sup> which finally brought Britain into the war were the

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Temperley and Penson, *Foundations of British Foreign Policy*, pp. 3 *et seq.*

violation of the Scheldt treaties to which France was a party and the plain intention of the Revolutionary government to annex Belgium and conquer Holland whom Britain was bound by a treaty of 1788 to defend. In accordance with that treaty Britain sent a body of troops, partly British and partly subsidised, to co-operate with the allies in Flanders. The campaigns in the Low Countries went on until February 1795, when the Dutch abandoned their resistance. The British army was then withdrawn.

While ministers had to take this defensive action they had also to co-operate offensively with the allies. They had a choice of four principal courses of action in 1793. They could stop French trade, assist the Vendéans in their revolt, take military advantage of the possession of Toulon, which was placed in British hands in August, or attack France in her colonies.

Action at sea began at once. Orders were given to capture all French ships, followed in August by orders to detain all cargoes of flour bound to French ports. No blockade was announced and ministers upheld their interference with neutral corn-carriers on the grounds that France was conducting the war in a manner contrary to the Law of Nations, that as the French corn trade had been taken over by the Government it was

not a private trade, and that the stoppage of these imports was a means of exerting pressure upon France; for owing to a bad harvest France was obliged to import grain. The battle of the First of June 1794 was fought to prevent a convoy of food ships from America from reaching France, but two months later the orders to intercept corn were repealed, as similar orders had been repealed in 1692 and 1709 and for the same reason: France was no longer dependent upon imported food-stuffs and the stoppage of such small quantities as she might import would not affect the course of the war. During the twenty years of war which followed no attempt was made to exert pressure upon France in this manner, for the very good reason that it was not possible to starve France into submission.

War in the Vendée was strongly urged by Edmund Burke. It was his theory that Britain was not at war with France but with the Jacobin faction which had usurped power and did not represent the country. The rising in Poitou was in his eyes a true expression of the real feelings of the French people which needed only a strong support from Britain to gather momentum and, snowball-like, increase as the insurgents moved on Paris to overthrow the Convention. The 40,000 peasants, ill-armed though they were, had done

more to embarrass the Jacobins of Paris than the whole of the allied armies. No blow, said Burke, either on the Eastern frontier or in the West Indies, could produce such results as one in the Vendée. All experience showed how costly in life and treasure expeditions to the fever-infected Caribbean were bound to be.

The possibility of attack from Toulon was examined and dismissed. It would require not less than 50,000 men and this number could not be provided at short notice by Britain, and the allies were fully engaged elsewhere. Toulon was shortly afterwards recovered by Bonaparte.

Burke's views were not accepted. The main offensive decided on was the capture of the French West Indian islands. This was not a mere policy of "snatching sugar islands", as it is sometimes represented. It was undertaken in the conviction that it was the blow which would most effectually contribute to the defeat of France. A ministerial presentation of the strategy was given by the Secretary at State for War at a later date. Britain's value as an ally lay in her commerce, the proceeds of which nourished her military ~~allies~~, and her commerce depended on her ~~naval~~ superiority. Hence her primary object should always be to

<sup>1</sup> Debate on the State of the Nation on March 1801. *Parliamentary History*, Vol. XLI, p. 107

increase the resources upon which that superiority depended and deprive the enemy of the same. "It is therefore as much the duty of those entrusted with the conduct of a British war to cut off the colonial resources of the enemy as it would be that of a general to destroy or intercept the magazines of his opponent"; and all the force not needed for safety at home should be devoted to such an offensive. Further, war deprived Britain of some of her markets, and as her export trade was an integral factor in her strength she must open new markets to replace those closed to her on the continent. The captured colonies would furnish the required openings. Over and above these reasons of Dundas's there were others. The undisciplined rabble of the French army was not expected to be able to resist for long the regular and well-officered armies of the allies, more particularly if they were unpaid. To deprive France of the means of payment was therefore a direct help to the allied armies, the last nail in the enemy's coffin. Pitt foresaw a "very short war, certainly one ended in one or two campaigns", for the French were in a gulf of bankruptcy and he "could almost calculate the time by which their resources would be consumed".

On the basis of this reasoning, and of the further fact that the capture of the islands was a direct

protection to a trade of such value that Nelson, in 1804, was certain that its loss would cause the City to throw up the struggle and make an ignominious peace, a series of campaigns was fought in the Antilles from 1794 to 1797. Pitt's forecast was sadly disappointed. Though several important islands were captured and the French colonial trade destroyed, it was at a cost of 100,000 men from disease; and the hopes of Dundas were not fulfilled. France, triumphing over her enemies on the continent, extorted sufficient wealth from them in loot and requisitions that she was able to continue the war. The First Coalition was broken by the defection of Prussia in 1795; then Spain, bribed with the promise of Portugal and Gibraltar, went over to the enemy; Sweden and Holland followed suit. Britain, faced with this formidable naval combination and lacking any foothold in the Mediterranean farther east than Gibraltar, withdrew her fleet from that sea, and in April 1797 Austria made peace at Leoben giving, as one of her reasons for so doing, the loss of naval support. Britain was now left to face France alone, threatened with invasion, her fleet mutinous, and the funds depressed. The withdrawal of the fleet from the Mediterranean rejoiced Napoleon, for it threw open to the French armies the sea communications with Italy and would make "Naples



tremble even in Sicily". Venice disappeared as an independent state, and France acquired the Ionian islands as a stepping stone to the East.

It was now towards the East that Napoleon's eyes were turning. He realised that Britain was the obstacle in his path to dominion and that he needed sea power to break through that obstacle. To recreate French sea power could not be done at once; time was needed, and money. What could be done was to increase his own resources and deprive Britain of some of hers. So he pillaged Holland and Switzerland and proceeded to prepare a fleet and army at Toulon for the conquest of India via Egypt. There, as he told his army, the most effective blow would be dealt while awaiting the death blow.

It was impossible to guess the destination of this armament—it might be Naples, Ireland, the West Indies, Portugal. The one place in which its intentions could be frustrated was at the point of departure. Hence a British squadron was ordered to the Mediterranean to deal with the Toulon armament: and that squadron had a further object. Austria, now anxious for her possessions in Italy, was showing an inclination to re-enter the war and her mood might be stiffened, and the courage of others revived, by the presence of the navy. "If by our appearance in the Mediterranean

we can encourage Austria to come forward again, it is in the highest degree probable that the other Powers will seize the opportunity of acting at the same time and such a general concert be established as shall soon bring the contest to a termination....”

The outcome was the battle of the Nile, the destruction of Napoleon's Eastern dream, and the paving of the way to the formation of a new coalition with Russia, Austria and Prussia; all of whom came cap in hand for subsidies. The old question of whether Britain should take part in continental operations or confine her efforts to the sea presented itself in another form. Dundas considered that subsidies were not called for; Britain was already contributing her full share in the war by her fleet in the Mediterranean and also because “the aversion of the country to paying more subsidies has been greatly increased by the unfaithful execution by our allies of previous engagements”; but he would not refuse a sum of not more than £100,000, to be divided between Austria and Russia, provided they would engage to try to end the war with security to Europe. Alternatively, a subsidy might be offered to Russia if she would provide an army for some specific objects—a vigorous attack on the French in Holland, the capture of Malta, the defence of

Switzerland, the capture of Brest or the opening of markets in South America. Ministers were in fact tired of pouring out money to allies who paid little heed to the common cause or to the engagements they made.

The Second Coalition came into being after much labour. Its terms included Russo-Turkish and Austro-Neapolitan alliances, an Austro-Russian agreement for combined action in Northern Italy, and an Anglo-Russian treaty, as Dundas had desired, for a subsidised Russian army to operate with a British combined force in Holland.

British strategy was now taking a new shape. The West Indian offensive had come to an end during 1797. What should take its place? A memorandum of 25 December 1797, written while Britain was alone in the war, suggested that as nothing could now be done on the continent Britain must look to her own security; and that she could best do this by attempting the destruction of the enemy's naval forces in their ports. The same view was repeated in another memorandum of August 1798, written before the news of the Nile had been received: "In the circumstances of the war in Europe it has been judged advisable that the efforts of the country should be directed as much as possible to the destruction of the enemy's naval forces."

The agreement with Russia provided the means, but it took time to assemble the forces of some 35,000 men, British and Russian, for the desired attack on the Dutch navy at the Helder base. That attack had two objects—the destruction of the Dutch ships of the line and the creating of a diversion in favour of the allied campaign in Suabia and Switzerland. The long delays in collecting the forces rendered the attempt at a diversion inoperative, but the fleet was taken. It was hoped to continue this policy of attack on the enemy fleets in 1800 by one upon the great French base of Brest, but Russian help failed to materialise; instead, therefore, and in pursuance of the policy of injuring the enemy's sea forces, a small force was sent to attempt the capture of Belleisle, the occupation of which would give the British a base from which they could cut into the coastal trade that fed the fleet at Brest with many of its needs; but the force was too small and effected nothing. At the same time, the Vendéans having again risen, help was to be given to them; but for the same reason of inadequacy this also failed. Two other attempts were made to weaken the enemy's navy. Small expeditions were sent to attack the naval ports of Ferrol and Cadiz, but on arrival off the ports the attempts were abandoned. In brief, though the ministry decided upon a policy, they failed to furnish the means required for its

execution and to select commanders of a character and outlook necessary for this form of warfare. The same defects had informed many of the coastal operations of the Seven Years' War of which a contemporary writer, Thomas More Molyneux, had observed: "It is a palpable demonstration from the number of conjunct armaments these Kingdoms have fitted out, and the many fruitless attempts that have been the issue of them, that there has been no right industry, no skill or watchful observation...." The results of want of forethought, of careful preparation and organisation were that opportunities were lost and "we flounder and flounce about" in attempting to retrieve them. It is well to be able to extemporise; but extemporisation is no substitute for thinking ahead, a clear definition of the object, and intensive preparation: unfortunately, this lesson has remained unlearned.

The failures of this time were by no means due solely to the British direction of strategy and its execution. High in the list of the causes of the allied failure to overcome their powerful enemy was the attitude of the allies themselves. Co-operation was impossible with governments who pursued their own ends, broke their engagements, and pocketed their subsidies with no attempt to fulfil the terms on which they were granted. Thus

the Russians failed to co-operate at the Helder and Brest, and British co-operation with Austria was rendered impossible by the refusal of the Austrian minister Thugut to inform London of the plans for the coming campaign in Italy, a request made in order to determine whether British assistance might be possible from the sea. There was a British force available, but as no information was given it was sent to Egypt to eject the marooned French army. Marengo, like Waterloo, was a very close-run affair: it is at least within the bounds of possibility that the army which went to Egypt might have turned the scales in that important battle.

While these military measures were being taken against the enemy's sea forces, efforts were also being made to cut off their supplies of naval stores; and trouble was in consequence brewing with the neutral sellers of these goods. The many controversies which had arisen in every war from the days of Elizabeth concerning the rights of belligerents and neutrals had reappeared in the early stages of this war. Difficulties with the United States had been smoothed over by Jay's treaty in 1794, but friction continued with the Northern Powers and, when efforts against the enemy's navies were being intensified, the pressure upon the neutral became more severe. In reply,

Denmark and Sweden proceeded to escort their merchantmen with men-of-war, claiming that vessels so escorted were rightly exempt from search, for the innocence of their cargoes was thereby established and the word of the naval commander was a sufficient guarantee. To this contention Britain could not possibly agree, not only because such declarations could not be relied upon, but also because the neutrals claimed as innocent certain goods in the form of naval stores and materials which the British declared to be contraband. Clashes between British squadrons and neutral escorts occurred in consequence during 1799 and 1800. The Czar, following the precedent of the Empress Catherine, thereupon invited Sweden, Denmark and Prussia to recreate the Armed Neutrality of 1780, and at the end of 1800 conventions were signed by these Powers jointly to repel any British attempts to interfere with convoys so escorted. How little related these claims were to any question of principle is illustrated by the fact that in 1793 both Russia and Prussia had joined in the British policy of excluding all commerce from France; and, for all the high-sounding pretensions that the natural rights of nations were being upheld, the plain fact was that it was not ethics but expediency and individual interests which governed the policy of these Powers.

Britain refused, as she had refused before, to admit the claim for exemption from search and for the asserted right of the neutral trader to supply her enemies with the means of fighting. She made her views known to all the Powers affected and her intention to uphold them. As they persisted, she sent a fleet to enforce her rights upon Denmark and to follow up, if necessary, with action against Russia. Copenhagen was bombarded (1801) and an armistice arranged, but action against Russia proved unnecessary owing to the sudden death of the hostile Czar with whose more friendly successor negotiations were opened in which some concessions were made on both sides. Britain agreed to exclude naval stores from her Russian contraband list; a concession, as Nelson remarked, which did no harm as she had no spare produce to dispose of nor shipping to carry it.<sup>1</sup> A limited degree of convoy was allowed but all the major belligerent rights were maintained.

The Peace of Amiens, hastily concluded by Pitt's weak successor Addington, brought an end to hostilities in March 1802. What had been Britain's part, and what her influence, in the nine years of struggle? As she could only assist her allies if she herself were secure, all her active

<sup>1</sup> *Parliamentary History*, Vol. xli, Debate of 3 November 1801.



contributory measures must spring from a solid foundation of security. Her two islands must be defended against invasion; her trade, her colonies and India, which furnished the wealth without which her allies could not have continued their resistance to the common enemy, must be guarded against attack from the sea and from hostile Princes within India. On the positive side, her contribution to the allied cause was, in the first phase, a blow intended to cripple the enemy financially by the destruction of his West Indian trade and her general attack upon French shipping. That trade was brought to a standstill, though no commercial blockade had been proclaimed; but the enemy, though suffering, was not reduced: for his natural wealth and his European conquests sustained him. The British command of the sea enabled British trade to expand<sup>1</sup> and it was the fruits of that expansion which enabled the country to bear the burden of the war and of her needy allies, to whom she paid, during those years, some

<sup>1</sup>	Imports	Exports and re-exports
Average of six years before 1793	£18,695,390	£20,239,063
Average of six years 1793-99	22,356,296	27,945,323
Value for year ending Jan. 1799	25,654,000	33,799,510

(Rosebery, *Pitt*, p. 155.)

nine millions in subsidies. No military aid in the main theatre in Europe which Britain could have given without crippling her efforts at sea, and foundering in consequence, could have saved those continental Powers from the defeats they suffered, for those defeats were the result of their own military ineptitude, inefficiency, mutual jealousies and greed, and political instability. In Lord Rosebery's words, "Europe was rotten". Holland, to whose help Britain had gone, had turned against her. Spain had joined her enemies with the promise of reward. Russia and Prussia used the opportunity to divide Poland and changed sides as the whims seized their rulers. Though Austria did not turn her coat, her out-of-date military system and the incompetency of the majority of her commanders placed her at a constant disadvantage in the field. To these Portugal furnished a striking exception, remaining steadfast to the old alliance until she was forced, in 1797, to make peace with France under a threat of invasion.

Exhaustion made the peace welcome to Napoleon. It gave him a breathing space to make his preparations for a renewal of the war against Britain and it restored to France and her vassals all the conquests made by Britain except Trinidad and Ceylon. It was plain to Napoleon that it was through Britain and her sea power that his

ambitions had been thwarted and that, if he was to obtain the dominion he desired, he must build up a fleet and foster his commerce. The ink was hardly dry on the Treaty of Amiens before he began to fill his dockyards with shipbuilding and to send expeditions to the East and West Indies to prepare the way for his further designs. It might, he said, take ten years to create the navy which would serve his purpose, but he could wait; and in any case he must have the support of Spain, Holland and Portugal. Those countries were therefore marked down for annexation and he went forward with numerous preparations for a renewal of his struggle with Britain. What he now needed was time.

Time, however, was precisely the very thing that his own policy denied him. His refusal to fulfil his undertaking to leave Holland and Switzerland, and his overbearing conduct, aroused the belief that he designed to become Emperor of the Gauls, a second Charlemagne. "These perpetual encroachments caused profound anxiety in Europe and induced it in despair to turn to England for support",<sup>1</sup> preferring, in the words of the Prussian minister Haugwitz, "the arbitrary behaviour of the English at sea", inconvenient though it might be, to the "infinitely more

<sup>1</sup> Emile Dard, *Napoleon and Talleyrand*, p. 57.

dangerous continental despotism". In this situation Britain refused to weaken her position at sea by evacuating Malta, and war once more broke out in 1803. Then, for two years, Britain was engaged in defending herself, single-handed, first against France, then, in 1804, against Spain as well. A great army in Picardy threatened her with invasion and her strategy was necessarily defensive, but she used her one weapon of offence—attack on the sea-borne trade and the colonies that were one of its principal supports. The expeditions which she sent to the Antilles had the offensive purpose of injuring France financially and the defensive of protecting British trade by the capture of the enemy's naval bases. Though there was a blockade of Brest, there was no commercial blockade of France, and neutral shipping with neutral non-contraband goods could enter and leave her ports; but her own goods could not be sent in payment, for the flag did not cover the goods.

During the two years of this "Trafalgar Campaign" Pitt was seeking how to build up another coalition. Nor was he alone. The Czar, seeing in the growth of French power a threat to his own designs, began to plan a defensive league with Austria, Prussia and Sweden as his partners and British help and subsidies. Out of this came the

Third Coalition in April 1805. Among the elements foreshadowed in the combined strategy was Russian action in the Eastern basin of the Mediterranean, where the British fleet, acting from Malta, was required to enable Russian armies to cross the sea into Italy. The fleet would need food, and food could only be conveniently supplied from Sicily. To hold Sicily was therefore vital; if that island were to fall into the hands of France, "it would become doubtful whether the blockade of Toulon could be maintained as effectively as it has been hitherto". Hence, in 1805, a British army was ordered to Sicily to secure the island.

In August 1805 Napoleon recognised finally that his great plan for concentrating the joint Franco-Spanish fleets in the Channel to cover the passage of the French army in its flat boats from the ports in Picardy had broken down, and that the Russians and Austrians were preparing to renew the war. With characteristic promptitude he abandoned the invasion, broke up the camp, and set his army in march for the Danube. "I mean to attack Austria before next November in order to have a free hand to deal with the Russians." Two months later he overthrew the Austrians at Ulm and followed up his victory with an unrelenting pressure which culminated in the over-

whelming defeat of the Austro-Russian army at Austerlitz on 2 December. Austria made peace; Russia withdrew her army to her own territory.

Three days after the battle of Ulm the Franco-Spanish fleet, putting to sea from Cadiz to return to the Mediterranean to oppose the passage of the small British army then on its way to Sicily, was met by the British fleet and defeated off Cape Trafalgar. The Napoleonic dream of commanding the Mediterranean was thereby put into abeyance, but it was for the time only. It was still the Emperor's intention to conquer Sicily, but the British army in Sicily, supported by the fleet, not only held the island but carried the war into Calabria, inflicting, in July 1806, a heavy defeat on the French at Maida which stimulated the opposition of the people and created increased difficulties for the French in Southern Italy.

The attempt to crush Britain by invasion having miscarried, Napoleon turned to an intensive economic warfare. The year 1806 saw the inauguration of the "Continental System", of which the principal aim was to ruin Britain by killing her export trade. This was not a new idea. As early as 1794 a French minister had said that the British should not be allowed to set foot anywhere between the Elbe and the Tagus, and in 1795 the intention to exclude Britain from the European markets had

informed the French bribe to Spain of the offer of Portugal. The system had its effective beginning in April 1806, when Napoleon forced the King of Prussia to exclude British goods from Hanover—an action to which Britain replied in May by a blockade from the Ems to the Elbe. It came into full force after Prussia, chafing under the French harrow, and confident in her army, had risen against Napoleon, only to be crushed at Jena and Auerstadt. In November Napoleon entered Berlin and from that capital issued the “Berlin Decree” declaring Britain blockaded and forbidding all commerce with her on the part of his allies and vassals.

A new phase of the war now began. The British ministry replied to this edict in January 1807 with an Order-in-Council. The Decree was stigmatised as a violation of the usages of war which entitled Britain to retaliate “in a like manner by investing the ports and coasts of the enemy” with her fleets, but that as she was unwilling to inflict such injury upon the neutral nations she refrained from instituting a blockade, capable though she was of doing so, and limited her action to the capture of all vessels trading between ports from which British trade was excluded. It is important to observe that this action was purely retaliatory; it was designed “to restrain the violence and retort

upon France the evils of their injustice". Though one of its effects would be to reduce French imports, it was not with the aim of bringing decisive pressure upon France by that means, or with the aim of injuring neutral commerce, that it was instituted, but to induce the recall of the Berlin Decree. This is shown in the Preamble of the later Order of 11 November 1807,<sup>1</sup> wherein it was said that as the first Order had not compelled the enemy to revoke his Decree, nor induced neutrals to interpose, a further step would be taken. All ports of France and her allies were pronounced to be subject to the same restrictions as if they were actually under blockade by naval force. This was the "Paper Blockade". Though it originated out of its predecessor, and was fundamentally an act of retaliation, it differed from that earlier act in that its intention was definitely to bring economic pressure upon the enemy. In the words of Mahan: "The battle between the sea and the land was to be fought out on Commerce....The imperial soldiers were turned into coast-guardsmen to shut out Great Britain from her markets; the British ships became revenue cutters to prohibit the trade of France. The neutral carrier, pocketing his pride, offered his services to either for pay, and the

<sup>1</sup> This was the fifth Order; there were fourteen Orders in 1807.



other then regarded him as taking part in hostilities.”<sup>1</sup>

While events were moving towards this situation in 1806, Britain took no part in the continental campaigns except in her expedition to Sicily already mentioned. She was occupied in confirming her command at sea. She recaptured the Cape of Good Hope in order to secure the route to India, and was busily employed in dealing with the new form of attack upon her trade by small French squadrons of powerful ships sent out from the Biscay ports. But there were voices warning her that this was not enough. The refugee French general Dumouriez was urging her to lend a hand in the Baltic where, in the absence of any British ships, the French privateers were having their own way, the result of which was that Denmark was veering towards France, and Russia, unless she were assisted, would lose Poland and not only make peace but “knowing that torpor of England” might even join Napoleon and draw the Northern Powers in with her: then, he concluded, with all the naval strength he would thereby possess, Napoleon would be in a position effectively to attack England at sea in 1808.

Events came very near to justifying the general's

<sup>1</sup> Mahan, *Influence of sea-power on the French Revolution and Empire*, Vol. II, p. 289.

forecast. After the collapse of Prussia, Napoleon marched on Russia and fought a severe winter campaign in 1806. His proclamation to his troops in January 1807 has a singularly modern ring. "We will not lay down our arms until a general peace has secured the power of our allies and restored to us our colonies and our freedom of trade. We have gained, on the Elbe and the Oder, Pondicherry, our Indian establishments, the Cape of Good Hope and the Spanish colonies.<sup>1</sup> Why should the Russians have the right to oppose our destiny and thwart our just designs?"

So, in the following spring Britain decided to send a force of British and subsidised troops to the Baltic. The first contingent of 6000 men only arrived in July. It was then too late. The Czar had already made his peace with Napoleon at Tilsit, Russia had passed over to the enemy, and a vast naval combination was forming against Britain as Dumouriez had foretold. The navies of Sweden, Denmark, Portugal, Venice and Russia were to be added to those already in Napoleon's hands, giving him a fleet of 130 sail with which to overthrow his principal enemy. He ordered Portugal to close her ports to the British and sent an

<sup>1</sup> He is referring to the retrocessions of the Treaty of Amiens. Bourienne, *Memoirs of Napoleon Bonaparte*, Vol. III, p. 4 (ed. 1837).

army under Junot to seize the fleet, impressing on him the urgency of the service; another army under Bernadotte was ordered to march into Denmark and take possession of the Danish fleet. But in both of these attempts he was forestalled. The terms of the treaty reached London, and ministers acted promptly. A British fleet and army were sent swiftly and with secrecy to Copenhagen to demand the surrender of the fleet, which was refused. The fleet was taken by force, and certainly no action was ever better justified. A British squadron went to the Tagus and, when Junot came hurrying to the outskirts of the city, it was only to see the fleet of Portugal sailing out of the harbour for Brazil under the protection of a British squadron; and a British force at once occupied Madeira to prevent its use by France as a naval base. It was returned at the end of the war.

Returning to Milan from Tilsit in November, Napoleon learned of the Order-in-Council of 11 November. He replied with a fresh and fierce Decree, declaring that any ship of any nation which submitted to search became thereby denationalised and that Britain was blockaded. Yet throughout this period he not only made no attempt to stop imports into England; he encouraged them. His policy was to stifle Britain with imports, cutting off the exports with which she paid for them.

Ministers recognised equally that exportation was vital to Britain, and therefore one of the great objects of their policy was to increase the export trade to the utmost both in Europe and America. A great smuggling industry was developed, and islands in the North Sea and Baltic were captured to serve as depots.

In February 1808 Napoleon forced Austria into the "Continental System" and at the same time drove Spain into antagonism by occupying its greater part. The Spaniards called on London for help, though technically Britain and Spain were still at war. The opportunity to weaken Napoleon by a diversion was thus opened. In August a small army was sent to Portugal and the Peninsular War began. Austria was thereby encouraged to take up arms again and called on Britain for a subsidy and a diversion in North Germany. The subsidy was given and an army was slowly assembled to be sent to Walcheren with the two objects of creating a diversion and destroying the dockyards at Antwerp and Flushing, the capture of the men-of-war afloat and building at Antwerp and in the Scheldt. The old curse of unreadiness laid its hand upon the expedition. It did not sail till the end of July and it was then too late to affect the Austrian campaign, for Aspern had already been fought in May and Wagram in July. It

failed, too, in its naval objects, partly through the delay in starting, but more because of the lethargic command of the "late" Lord Chatham. What might have been effected if there had been more foresight and more vigour both in preparation and execution is shown by the anxiety the expedition created in Napoleon's mind.

The war in the Peninsula provided the great diversion needed to weaken Napoleon in Central Europe. It had ever been a question whether Britain's principal military effort should be made in the main theatre in Europe or on the fringe. How the Duke of Wellington regarded the matter in this instance is shown in a letter to Lord Bathurst in December 1813. Wellington's army had then reached the frontier of the Pyrenees and the Czar had expressed the wish that it should be transferred to the Netherlands and join the allied armies there. Wellington, premising his reply with the observation that the choice of the scene of the operations of the army rested with the ministers, pointed out that "by having kept in the field about 30,000 men in the Peninsula, the British Government have now, for five years, given employment to 200,000 French troops, of the best Napoleon had". Neither the Spaniards nor the Portuguese could have resisted a day without their support. Not less than 100,000 were now opposed to him and

with 40,000 Spaniards he could capture positions on the Garonne and "does any man suppose that Napoleon would not feel an army in such a position more than he would feel 30,000 or 40,000 British troops laying siege to one of his fortresses in Holland?" In other words, 30,000 men were worth no more than the same number in the main theatre; in the south of France they were worth three times their number.

The Peninsular War had been in progress for three years when, in 1812, war broke out with the United States. The British measures against Napoleon had aroused protests from America as early as 1806, and in 1807 Jefferson had passed Acts of Non-Intercourse and Embargo of which the object was to induce France and Britain to mitigate their action against American commerce. Though nominally applying equally to both belligerents, in practice the Acts affected Britain only, for France was debarred from direct trade with America by the British command of the sea. The rights and wrongs of the unhappy differences between Washington and London go beyond the province of the present sketch, which is concerned only with the strategical problem of the respective parts played by economic and military forms of action and their effects. Shortly speaking, two causes were in dispute. Britain, hard pressed to

maintain her navy against the immense resources at Napoleon's disposal, claimed the rights to remove British seamen from American ships, and to retaliate in the manner of the Orders-in-Council, to the Napoleonic Decrees. On the other side, the American slogan was "Free Trade and Sailor's Rights".

That the war was a tragic error on both sides can hardly be disputed to-day. On the part of the United States, it involved her in a struggle with her best customer, in the complete loss of the very trade she went to war to increase, in a military campaign wholly unrelated to the matters under dispute, which failed, and in great distress throughout her seaboard. It was unnecessary, for the commercial issues arising out of the Orders-in-Council were on the very verge of settlement at the moment war was declared—the Orders were revoked on 23 June and war had been declared five days earlier, and though the news of the revocation could not reach Washington at once, it arrived before any military operations of importance had begun. If the true reason for war had been the Orders, the matter was settled; but it was not. It was not from the maritime provinces, the regions affected by the Orders, that the cry came for war but from Kentucky in the west and Georgia in the south, who clamoured for the con-

quests of Canada and Florida. The West, according to a recent American historian,<sup>1</sup> was much more preoccupied with thoughts of Canada than with any plan for the preservation of maritime rights.

On the British side the war was a strategical error. In the struggle with Napoleon she had the use of two weapons—the economic, with which she was retaliating to his attempts to strangle her by his “Continental System”, and the military, with which she was draining his armies in Spain. The problem which ministers had to resolve was, which was the greater need—to enforce in their integrity the measures against French commerce or to weaken Napoleon’s military strength. There were, as the American *chargé d’affaires* observed, three good reasons why Britain should adopt a conciliatory attitude: “The scarcity of bread... the distress of the manufacturing towns, and the absolute dependency of the allied troops in the Peninsula for our supplies.”<sup>2</sup> For there was a great shortage of corn in England and the army in Spain was being fed largely from America. If, instead of rigidly enforcing the Orders towards the United States, Britain had restricted her action to search—a right fully recognised by the Americans—it

<sup>1</sup> Julius W. Pratt, “Footnote to the war of 1812”, *American Mercury*, October 1927.

<sup>2</sup> Mahan, *Sea Power in its relations to the War of 1812*, Vol. 1, p. 275.



would have been practicable still to exclude shipping from France and to benefit America by making it possible for her shipping to enter into a profitable trade with Spain and Portugal. Of the two measures open to ministers it is now clear that it would have been more to her advantage to support the military campaign to the utmost in her power. By attaching so great an importance to the excluding element in the economic campaign—as distinguished from the retaliatory which informed the first Order-in-Council—a neutral on whose supplies the great military diversion depended was antagonised, and naval forces were deflected from the European theatre where the need for them was great from the Baltic to the Dardanelles.<sup>1</sup>

In the beginning of 1812 the key of the situation lay in Russia. Alone of the European rulers the Czar had not submitted to Napoleon's decrees. These decrees had inflicted great injury upon the commerce of his subjects, stopping the export of their timber and other bulky goods. As early as 1811 Napoleon had decided that the Russian leak in his blockade must be closed and had begun preparations for war, and his demands upon

<sup>1</sup> During the war the United States sent out 515 privateers, thus making a great demand upon the British smaller fighting vessels.

Russia became truculent in the spring of 1812. War was now certain, and with that the greater became the importance of the diversion in the Peninsula.

The connection between the economic warfare and the military operations is clear. The decrees were Napoleon's weapon for the crushing of Britain. Those decrees constituted a half-blockade of Europe, and the Orders-in-Council then forced the Emperor into more extensive, and more injurious, measures, of which the effect was to force Russia, in self-defence, to refuse to be the agent of her own ruin. In the spring of 1812 the Grande Armée, 700,000 strong, invaded Russia. In December its remnant, 100,000 only, recrossed the Beresina. The Grand Alliance came into being which finally overwhelmed the great Emperor.

The end of the war saw Britain in possession of the whole of the colonial territories of her enemies. The reasons for the colonial expeditions of the Revolutionary and Napoleonic wars were precisely the same as those for the corresponding enterprises of the earlier wars. Now, as then, it was not "imperialism" which dictated strategy but the strategical needs of depriving the enemy of the wealth they derived from the colonies, of the shipping and seamen created by the trade, and of the bases oversea from which he conducted

his sea warfare. The instructions issued by Castlereagh in 1813 furnish a refutation of the charge that Britain, in order to expand her Empire, left her allies in the lurch to do the fighting while she added the enemy's colonies to her own. In his "Memorandum on a Maritime Peace" he laid down that if the independence of Spain and Holland were effectually provided for and the peace of the continent amicably secured, Britain would throw her conquests into the scale of the general interests. The Government, he wrote, "do not desire to retain any of those colonies for their mere commercial value—too happy if by their restoration they can give other states an additional motive to cultivate the arts of peace. The only objects to which they desire to adhere are those which effect essentially the engagement and security of their own dominion." Accordingly, only those positions which were of a fundamental strategical importance were retained: Malta, Tobago, St Lucia, Mauritius with its dependencies, Demerara, Essequibo, Berbice, and the Cape of Good Hope, whose importance on the route to India is so plain to us to-day and for which Britain paid Holland the sum of two million sterling in compensation. All the vast and valuable remainder was returned to its original owners. Under no condition could Antwerp be held by France. "To

leave it in the hands of France is little short of imposing upon Great Britain the charge of a perpetual war establishment. After all we have done for the Continent in this war they owe it to us and to themselves to extinguish this fruitful source of danger to both."<sup>1</sup>

In the course of the Conference the Powers attempted to raise the question which goes by the name of "the Freedom of the Seas"; in other words to abolish those maritime rights to which they themselves owed so greatly their escape from subjection. But here the British Government were adamant. "Great Britain", said Castlereagh, "may be driven out of a Congress but not out of her Maritime Rights." It was plain that she would surrender none of those rights which had been so consistently upheld from the days of Elizabeth, and the Powers gave way. It was to be left to weaker spirits some forty years later to throw away the ancient weapon and for a yet later generation to pay dearly for so doing.

<sup>1</sup> *Castlereagh Correspondence*, Vol. ix, pp. 73-5.

## CHAPTER VIII

### THE NINETEENTH CENTURY AND THE WAR OF 1914-18

Nelson was once Britannia's god of war  
And still should be so, but the tide is turned.  
There's no more to be said of Trafalgar,  
'Tis with our hero quietly inurned:  
Because the army's grown more popular  
At which our naval people are concerned.

BYRON's jingle indicated the trend of thought which came into being after the Napoleonic wars. The great military drama of the six years of the Peninsular War, followed by the final crowning victory of Waterloo, absorbed public attention and obscured the part which sea power, working with an economic end as well as an instrument of the amphibious diversionary effort in Spain, had played, both in the long struggle that was then just ended, as well as in all of those of the preceding century. The literature of the war was almost exclusively military. While Napier told in magnificent prose the story of the war in Spain, no writer appeared to tell, with a like splendour of description, the tale of the warfare at sea and its corroding effects upon Napoleon's fortunes:

nor, it must be said, did the war at sea afford a subject so rich in dramatic material. Symptomatic, perhaps, of this attitude of mind is the fact that it was not until 1843, thirty-eight years after Trafalgar, that the nation raised a monument to Nelson.

For over a century British statesmen had been almost continuously faced with two immediate problems. They had had to decide whether to intervene in the continental quarrels, many of which had no direct interest to England; and, if intervention was considered necessary, how to employ the national strength to the best effect with the aim of assisting the nation's allies to crush the common enemy. The situation in Europe after 1815 presented no problems corresponding to those of Louis XIV, Louis XV or Revolutionary and Napoleonic France. In the first stages of international relations after the peace, the Quadruple Alliance of Austria, Prussia, Russia and Britain, joined later by France, appeared to constitute a permanent assurance that the public law of Europe would be upheld and preserved. Disputes did indeed arise in numbers—the Greek wars of 1820 and 1827, the Spanish Revolution of 1820-23, then the threat to Portugal in 1826, the Miguelite war, the Belgian-Dutch question of 1831, the wars of Mehemet Ali in Egypt and Syria: but

none of these brought groups of the great Powers into serious opposition, and, though sympathies might lie in different camps, none of the questions was of such an importance as to cause a war. The principle of non-intervention in the internal affairs of other nations was repeatedly affirmed by British statesmen.

In the sphere of strategy it may be said that attention was directed practically exclusively to one side of the subject only, defence, to one part of defence, defence against invasion, and to one aspect of that problem, the material. Steam had come into use, and though it was not for many years the sole means of propulsion it had brought a new factor into naval warfare: blows could be struck with a rapidity hitherto absent. It was the opinion of the Duke of Wellington that invasion had been facilitated, and that the country was now not safe for a week after the declaration of war. The most probable enemy, France, could seize no less than seven small defenceless harbours or river mouths, land any army, and establish its cross-Channel communications;<sup>1</sup> and while the Duke propounded these doctrines the naval world was silent and (in the words of Admiral Colomb) the "local defence doctrine" went forward with very little check from the naval mind. One great

<sup>1</sup> In a letter to Sir John Burgoyne, published in 1843.

seaman, Lord Dundonald, did however oppose the theory of passive defence. "Immovable stations of defence, as a protection against invasion, are not only costly and of doubtful utility, but a reliance on them is, in my mind, an indication of a declining state." It was sheer imbecility to suppose he would come to the forts when he could operate elsewhere without the slightest regard to them. Numerous fortifications were a national weakness, since the army which should be concentrated in the field against the enemy was split into fragments and scattered. With sound sense he said: "There is no security equal to that which may be obtained by putting it out of the power of the enemy to execute hostile intentions."<sup>1</sup> In other words, offence was the best defence.

Defence, however, had its grip upon the national mind. As forts were preferred to ships, and passive resistance to active operations, so, in the sphere of economic warfare, security against attack took precedence over attacking the enemy in his commerce. It will have been seen how strongly the rulers of the country from Elizabeth to Castlereagh had opposed any relaxations of British belligerent rights. Great perils had been faced in upholding them, sometimes it had been necessary to bend to the storm; but when this

<sup>1</sup> Quoted in *Hansard*, Vol. CLXVI, p. 591.



was done, it was for the time only, nor was it ever admitted or accepted that the Law of Nations did not approve the British view. Those rights were now deserted. They were first undermined when, during the Russian war, Britain, then being in alliance with France, in order to meet the wishes and conform to the conduct of her ally, agreed not to employ privateers or capture enemy goods in neutral bottoms. After the war France proposed that a code of international law should be established which should finally abolish privateering, make permanent the rule of "Free ships, Free goods", provide for freedom from capture of neutral goods except contraband on board enemy ships, and lay down that blockades can be binding only when effective.

In the beliefs that the defensive advantages, the increase in security, which would result from the abolition of privateering outweighed the loss of offensive power derived from the capture of enemy goods on board neutral ships; that the proposal would induce the United States, who regarded privateers as essential because of their weakness in fighting ships, to consent to the abolition; that the retention of the right of capture was in reality valueless as in future wars it would prove impossible to exercise it in the face of world opposition, this drastic change, depriving Britain

of one of her only means of bringing pressure upon an enemy and assisting her allies in any other way than by the use of large land forces, was agreed to. "It is quite clear", wrote Lord Clarendon to Palmerston on 6 April 1856, "that we can never again re-establish our ancient doctrine respecting neutrals." We must abandon capture "under pain of having all mankind against us". The United States were pressing for the principle that the neutral flag covers the goods and Clarendon proposed that this should be agreed to provided the States in return gave up privateering.<sup>1</sup> The belief that they would do so proved ill-founded and the expected security illusory. The surrender was made, but the compensation was not forthcoming. The United States retained privateering and asked for a further concession—the total exemption of private property from capture. This, however, was more than the British Government could concede.

The surrender did not pass without criticism. Admiral Sir Charles Napier pointed out that the only form of offensive now open to British sea power was blockade, conducted under rigidly limited conditions, and that this in turn would

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Sir William Malkin, *British Year book of International Law*, 1927, p. 26.

be impossible against France with the existing navy: even double or treble the force would be needed. Lord John Russell considered that Britain had been shorn of her strength. "The way in which we have been able to finish wars with great Powers, especially with France, has been by destroying the enemy's trade. We have brought the Powers with whom we have been at war to such a state that their finances have become disordered. They have been ready to listen to terms of peace and thereby the wars have been terminated." Now, such countries would be able to maintain their trade in full vigour and safety in neutral vessels and would have no reason for making peace, not being thus distressed. Britain might gain naval victories, she might drive the enemy's fighting forces from the seas; but that would not produce peace.<sup>1</sup> He saw, in other words, that essential as the destruction of the fighting forces is, it is not an end in itself but the means to an end or ends, of which one was the exercise of pressure upon the enemy people through the disorder and distress of their trade and finance. Lord Salisbury, speaking at a later date (1871), expressed a similar view. The fleet in the past had been a powerful instrument in hampering and ultimately subduing Napoleon, since the power

<sup>1</sup> *Hansard*, 14 July 1857, Vol. CXLVI, p. 1491.

then existed of declaring a general blockade and searching neutral ships for enemy goods. In "reckless optimism" these two weapons had been thrown away. "I believe that since the Declaration of Paris the fleet, valuable as it is for preventing an invasion of these shores, is almost valueless for other purposes."<sup>1</sup>

Although the United States did not relinquish the privateer, she disappeared in practice: but in so far as the loss of British belligerent rights was concerned no increase in security resulted, for in her place other forms of commerce attacker arose. Russia and France built armoured cruisers specifically for conducting the *guerre-de-course*, the armed merchantman was provided for by all nations, the torpedo boat, intended to sally from the French Channel and other ports and sink merchantmen with her torpedoes, followed in due time by the submarine and aircraft and the small modern torpedo boat—all these have taken the place of the privateer: so that, while an offensive power was sacrificed, the sacrifice was without any of the expected compensation in safety; nor does modern experience confirm with any certain voice that Lord Clarendon's fears were justified.

The civil war in America (1861-66) brought

<sup>1</sup> *Hansard*, 6 March 1871, p. 1364.

some far-reaching innovations and extensions of international law in favour of the offensive use of sea power. The success of the North depended largely upon stopping the trade of their opponents. There was then no talk of the "freedom of the seas": the utmost pressure which it was possible to apply was applied. In his reasoned opposition to freeing "private property" from capture, Mahan wrote that if neutral trade could have continued without interruption "the cotton of the Confederacy, innocent private property, would have gone through. Commerce, the source of national wealth, would have flourished in full vigour. Supplies, except contraband, could have flowed unmolested. And all this at the price of merely killing some hundreds of thousands more men, in the proportionate expenditure of money, in the effort to maintain the Union, which would probably have failed to the immeasurable loss of both sections."

Notwithstanding this plain example of the influence of economic pressure, the spirit of the defensive in strategy had a firm grip on many minds in England. To some extent it was owing to an outlook on foreign policy. The "non-interventionist" statesmen of the eighteenth century had their successors in the nineteenth. According to this school of political thought

Britain should take no part in the disputes in Europe; the Eastern Question, the possession of Constantinople, the Low Countries, were all matters in which she was unconcerned. Certainly she must preserve her superiority at sea—Cobden himself “would if necessary spend 100 million sterling to maintain an irresistible superiority over France at sea”. Her position was assumed to be that of the permanent neutral and it was in that light and capacity she should act. Her first concern must therefore be to secure neutral and reduce belligerent rights. The injuries done to the Northerners’ shipping by the Confederate “corsairs” impressed many with the dangers to which British trade would be exposed so long as capture at sea was permitted, so there arose a strong movement for its abolition. Linked with this was the question of contraband. It has been shown how strenuously the statesmen of the old wars had maintained the right to determine and define what goods were of service to the enemy, from ship’s stores to foodstuffs. Now, it was not the pressure upon the enemy resulting from cutting off goods of a contraband character that was the first consideration but the effects upon Britain if goods which the enemy proclaimed as contraband could not reach England. If, when she was at war, her shipping should cease to sail because of

the impossibility of giving it adequate protection, the country would be dependent upon the neutral carrier, and the only goods which he could bring would be those which were free. Hence, it was argued, British interests demanded the most drastic limitation of the contraband list, and the need for a particularised definition of such goods; it must not include either foodstuffs or the raw materials of industry. It was assumed that an enemy so strong at sea as to make the defence of trade impossible would respect the list—an assumption which the experiences of recent years has shown to be illusory. In accordance with these principles Britain protested against the declaration by France of rice as contraband in the Franco-Chinese war and by Russia of foodstuffs and fuel in the Russo-Japanese war, protests which were without effect. The manners in which these protests were ignored might be regarded as warning signs against too great a reliance on the observance of agreements which favoured British interests and stood in the way of a warring nation's success.

So the strategical question which principally occupied men's minds was not how Britain would make war, either alone or in support of a common cause, but how, if she were attacked, she would defend herself. International agreements were to play a great part in preserving her lifelines—the

trade routes. In a "general" war—as distinguished from those "small" wars in Asia and Africa which were bound to occur in defence of her widely spread interests and responsibilities—it was assumed that the functions of the army would be almost exclusively defensive. This is illustrated by the definition of the functions of the military forces given by Mr Stanhope in 1888. They were: the support of the civil power, the security, internal and external, of India, the garrisoning of fortresses at home and abroad, home defence, and the provision of a small oversea force of two army corps. "But it will be distinctly understood", the memorandum went on to say, "that the probability of the employment of an army corps in the field of any European war is sufficiently improbable to make it the primary duty of the military authorities to organise our forces efficiently for the defence of this country." Apart from the fact that this practically ruled out any possibility of conducting those diversionary operations which had played a part in many of the great wars, it seems also to show a want of appreciation of one task of the army in the purely defensive sphere. The defence of trade was never confined to the sea; the capture of the bases from which attacks were made in all parts of the world from the North Sea to the outermost oceans was an essential factor in defence.



The movement for the abolition of capture was resumed in the early years of the twentieth century. Although in the initial stages of the discussions the reasoning for abolition had been based mainly upon the assumption that it would be impossible to protect trade, in these later proposals the further argument was advanced that the right conferred no advantages and was without influence in war. Lord Loreburn argued that the exercise of capture would not bring upon an enemy a pressure so severe that it would be decisive, for the enemy would be fully supplied by the neutral. "Unoffending" ships and "innocent" cargoes should go unmolested—a suggestion which begged the question as to what ships and cargoes were entitled to those descriptions: for all trade nourishes a belligerent, and the war which followed showed how few were the materials which made no contribution to fighting power in one form or another. It failed also to take account of the deterrent effect of capture and the stoppage and dislocation of commerce, it discounted the importance of trade in a great war in which millions of men are serving in the national armies whose needs, in a vast range of raw materials, have to be met by purchases from abroad, purchases which must be paid for in goods, cash or credit. Other arguments took the line that in recent modern

wars commerce had played no part: an assertion which failed to take note of the fact that those wars were fought between nations under conditions totally different from those of a war in which Britain might find herself engaged when opposing, in association with others, the aggression of a great Power. They were wars between individual contiguous states in which, from the very nature of the case, the decision must come from the results of the military campaigns: economic pressure would have neither time nor opportunity to make itself felt in any but a minor degree. None bore any likeness to those prolonged struggles of several nations in which economic pressure had been used as one of the weapons against the common enemy—never as the sole weapon. Deductions were in fact drawn from experiences of a limited scope and of a character different from that of the struggle whose shadow was already falling across Europe.

The Government was neither convinced of the ineffectiveness of capture nor of the impossibility of defending British trade, but it doubted the possibility of stopping contraband which the enemy would obtain through the neutral ports. Such concealments of destination could be made that the doctrine of continuous voyage could not be put into practice. Hence it was proposed that

all contraband should be abolished, so that all kinds of goods could reach England unmolested. If, however, this should not be accepted—as it was not—contraband should be rigidly defined and those raw materials needed by British industry, such as cotton, metallic ores, and food, should be secured against interference. National strategy was based upon the defensive.

The Declaration of London of 1907, although it was not ratified by Parliament, removed any anxieties which Germany might feel about British sea power. It could now do her no injury except in attacking her colonies; and the loss of the colonies would not effect the course of a European war for, unlike the French colonies in the past, they were neither sources of revenue nor nurseries of seamen. They had in fact no economic value and no military significance except as naval bases from which attack could be made upon British trade, or attacks launched against the neighbouring British colonies and, if they should be conquered, they would be recovered at the peace in return for concessions to the conquered continental enemies.

The increases in the German navy resulting from a succession of Navy Laws,<sup>1</sup> combined with

<sup>1</sup> First Navy Law, 1898; Second Navy Law, 1900; Supplementary Laws of 1906 and 1908. Cf. Woodward, *Great Britain and the German Navy*; Tirpitz, *My Memoirs*.

the tone of the German press and the whole trend of German policy in international affairs, created uneasiness in British public opinion. British power at sea, and therefore British security, were being challenged, and the challenge must be met. There were two steps open: shipbuilding, to maintain the necessary superiority, and co-operation with other threatened Powers on the continent. "There is no half way house," said Sir Edward Grey on 20 November 1908, "as far as we are concerned, in naval affairs between complete safety and absolute ruin." In the succeeding years the situation grew more threatening and, in the same way as the statesmen of the eighteenth century had adopted the policy of joining in opposition to the attempts of France to dominate the continent for the reason that a France with Europe at her feet would be able and willing to outbuild Britain at sea and have her and her trade and colonies at her mercy, the rise of the German navy, and the openly expressed expansionist intentions of the country, produced similar reactions. Sir Edward Grey put this feeling into words identical in spirit with those used by many a statesman of the eighteenth century in the discussions as to whether or not Britain should throw her lot in with other resisting threatened Powers. Speaking to the Dominion delegates in 1911, he said that

the policy of Great Britain was determined by the question of sea power: sea power underlay all British European policy:

There is no danger, no appreciable danger, of our being involved in any considerable trouble in Europe unless there is some Power, or group of Powers, in Europe which has the ambition of achieving what I call the Napoleonic policy. That would be the policy on the part of the strongest Power in Europe, or of the strongest group of Powers in Europe, if, first of all separating the other Powers outside their own group from one another, taking them in detail, crushing them if need be, and forcing each into the orbit of the policy of the strongest Power or the strongest group of Powers... The result would be one great combination in Europe, outside which we would be left without a friend. If that was the result, then the naval situation would be this, that if we meant to keep our command of the sea, we should have to estimate a probable combination against us of the fleets of Europe, not of two Powers but of five Powers.<sup>1</sup>

The year in which this speech was made saw a definite hardening of the political situation in the Agadir affair, which served as a jumping board for a further Supplementary German Navy Law in 1912. One aim runs continually through the expressions of German naval policy at this time—the desire to neutralise England in the coming

<sup>1</sup> Gooch and Temperley, *British Documents*, Vol. vi, pp. 781-4.

war: Tirpitz even went so far as to say: "I would have sacrificed the whole Bill for a really solid agreement of neutrality." But if Britain refused to commit herself to standing aside while Germany achieved her conquest of Europe, the navy policy had the declared object of deterring her from intervening by fear of the risk to which she would be exposed from the German navy. This, the so-called "risk theory", was however not the final aim of German naval policy, which looked to the eventual attainment of a strength at sea fully capable of challenging that of Britain.

The war which broke out in August 1914 was expected in many quarters to be short. Von Bülow relates that Bethmann-Hollweg had said to him: "It will be a violent storm but very short: I count on a war of three, or at most of four months, and I have organised all my policy on that assumption." Nor was he alone in this idea; various economists had expressed the opinion that no modern war could be kept up for longer than a few months on account of the immense expenditure. If that forecast were true, British sea power could not play the part it had played in the past, for there would not be time for its slow pressure to make itself felt, the more particularly since its sword had been blunted by the succession of emasculations of maritime rights between 1856 and 1908.

Disbelief of the value of British sea power was not confined to Germany. In 1908 Clemenceau took a hectoring tone towards Britain with the object of forcing her to increase her army, saying she "had no right to take a high line in European politics unless she equipped herself with a conscript army and was prepared to appear in the same force as other nations in the continental field. Otherwise she might make a nice hole in the sea by sinking the German fleet and leave Paris at the mercy of a German army. On these terms she was too dangerous a partner for France."<sup>1</sup> This contempt for the value of sea power was shared by military men. Conrad von Hötzendorf ignored Great Britain as a factor in a European war, Marshal Foch thought the British Navy not worth a single bayonet, and even British generals, who were imbued with French doctrines, took the same view. Whereas certain earlier thinkers like Colonel Henderson had regarded the first duty of a British army to be to help the navy to obtain command of the sea, the new school reversed the doctrine. According to them the duty of the navy was to carry the army to whatever place it wished to go. The directing authority of war was the so-called "War" Office.

<sup>1</sup> J. A. Spender, "British Foreign Policy in the reign of King George V", *International Affairs*, Vol. xiv, p. 463.

Wars were only to be won by the "continental" method.

In the earlier wars we have seen that the problem of how the war should be conducted, whether by sea or by land, by action in the main theatre as a reinforcement, or in other theatres as a diversion, was the subject of discussion by Inner Committees of the Privy Council, Select Committees of the Cabinet, or some analogous body of statesmen; and it came under the criticism of Parliament in the course of the wars. Such examination was lacking in the preparation for the war that began in August 1914. The Foreign Secretary authorised conversations between the military and naval staffs of Britain and France, and the Fighting Departments prepared individual plans for mobilising their respective forces and moving them to the places in which they would be needed to do what those Departments had determined. But the Cabinet never took any part in deciding how the war should be fought. So far as what might be called a "war plan" was concerned, it went no further than using the army to reinforce the French army and the fleet to exercise such remnants of belligerent rights as the various Declarations and Conventions had left to the sea power after its shearing. Each Fighting Department had its own view; and at the same



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time a movement in favour of national service was actively conducted mainly on the grounds of the inability of a navy to ensure the country against invasion. Lord Esher tells us that he opposed this proposal for the reason that if an army were provided to defend the country the effect would be to economise upon the navy, and that the Two Power Standard would be sacrificed. A million men might certainly defy an invasion, but with a weakened power at sea she would exercise no influence beyond her own shores.

None of this, however, touched upon the great strategical problem of how the full strength of the country was to be used in co-operation with our probable allies against the probable combination of enemies. Certainly, problems of military strategy were discussed by the Committee of Imperial Defence, such as whether the army should be used "continentally" or diversionally: but those discussions got no further than the Committee room. Admiral Fisher made a characteristic comment on these talks:

Ain't we d---d fools to go on wasting our very precious moments in these abstruse disquisitions on the Grebbe Line or the passage of the Dutch-German frontier river, and whether the bloody fight is to be at Rheims or Amiens, until the Cabinet have decided the great big question raised in your (viz. Lord Esher's) E. 5? Are we, or are we not, going to send a British

army to fight on the continent, as quite distinct and apart from coastal raids and seizure of islands &c. which the Navy dominate (*sic*)? Had not the Prime Minister better get this fixed up before we have any more discussions such as are foreshadowed to-morrow?

The opinion that preparations for war were matters for the Departments only went even further. Fisher's successor at the Admiralty took exception to any general planning of naval and military operations by the Defence Committee, holding that these were measures which should be left to the Chief of the General Staff and the First Sea Lord to discuss and arrange between themselves.<sup>1</sup>

Some study was given to the question of the extent to which economic pressure could be exerted, but it would be flattery to describe that examination as comprehensive or as thorough as the importance of the matter deserved, though it is necessary to recognise that the limitations imposed by the various Declarations and Conventions restricted its scope. It was not possible to declare a blockade and indirect trade could continue with no greater difficulties than those resulting from congestion at neutral ports or on the rail and canal routes from those ports to

<sup>1</sup> *Letters and Journals of Reginald Viscount Escher*, Vol. II, pp. 390 *et seq.*

German territory. But it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that there was a large measure of what to-day we call "wishful thinking" in the assumption that any effective curb to Germany's war effort would be produced by the suspension of the sailings of the German mercantile marine and the closing of the direct approaches to the German ports to the very limited list of contraband goods as defined in the recent Convention; and it is hardly open to doubt that the vast range of trickery by which the ownership and destination of cargoes could be concealed was not foreseen—false manifests and charter parties, bogus receivers and merchants in neutral countries—though many of them had been used by the Dutch during Charles II's wars in the seventeenth century.<sup>1</sup>

Thus, when war was declared, a part of the expeditionary force was sent to the continent to reinforce the French army, a cruiser squadron drew a line across the North Sea to intercept shipping, a flotilla of small craft observed Dover Straits; while in support of each of these detachments were the main battle fleet at Scapa Flow, the second battle fleet in the Channel, and the light forces of cruisers and destroyers at Harwich.

The hard and unescapable facts of war soon

<sup>1</sup> Cf. D. J. Llewellyn Davies, *British Year Book of International Law*, 1934, pp. 24 *et seq.*

disclosed the fallacies on which the restraints imposed upon sea power rested. It became plain that Britain could not make use of her natural strength so long as it was muzzled by the unratified Declaration of London. Those restraints on contraband, designed to protect British interests when neutral and to immunise her foodstuffs and the raw materials of her industry in war, were now shielding the very goods the enemy needed to enable him to stand the strain of a great war. A vast industry at once sprang into being in the neutral countries through the ports of Holland, Denmark, Sweden and Norway in the north and Italy in the south. The imports of all these countries made remarkable expansions and they, as well as Germany and the United States, made strenuous efforts to induce Britain to ratify and act in accordance with the Declaration which operated so much in the favour of their pockets and Germany's war interests. Gradually, though gradually only, those rules were abrogated, though not before they had been the means of allowing vast quantities of goods to enter Germany and sustain her resistance. Designed, ostensibly, to minimise the rigours and distresses of war, their real result was to add to the sufferings of the whole world through the prolongation of the war. How Ludendorff regarded the economic pressure, and

what might have been done had sea power not been mutilated, is illustrated in the following extract:

A three years war was only possible because we had in Germany abundant coal and so much iron and food that together with what we could obtain from occupied territory and neutral countries, we could, by practising the most rigid economy, manage to exist in spite of the hostile blockade. Only by offensive action in the war which had been forced upon us and by expanding to the east and west had we been able to exist... The importance in war of coal, iron and food was known before this war: how absolutely decisive they would actually become was only demonstrated to all the world as hostilities proceeded.<sup>1</sup>

And again: "Left entirely to herself, without any outside help, Germany could not exist, as is proved by the great distress in the winter of 1918-19. Disaster would certainly have come without help from the Ukraine."<sup>2</sup> Falkenhayn was no less impressed with the part played by resources. Writing of the period of even before 1917, he said: "A carefully calculated husbanding of these war resources was of enormous importance, and we had unconditionally to renounce all operations the demands of which over-taxed our power to hold out."<sup>3</sup>

The question of what action should be taken

<sup>1</sup> Ludendorff, *My War Memories*, Vol. II, pp. 517.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* p. 558.

<sup>3</sup> Falkenhayn, *General Headquarters*, 1914-18, p. 290.

about the enemy colonies had not been considered before the war. In the past wars, as we have seen, they were regarded as important sources of financial strength, but this was not the case with the German colonies, which were rather a charge upon the German exchequer than an asset; in place of the 30 % of her foreign trade which France had conducted with her colonies the trade of Germany with hers was no more than a half of 1 %. But they were, as the French oversea possessions had been, bases for attack upon the allied trade routes and from them incursions could be made into neighbouring British colonies and disaffection, where it existed, fostered. There was also the possibility that the enemy might achieve conquests in Europe, as his aggressive forerunners had done, and that captured colonies might be used for bargaining at the peace, as they had been in the old wars. Hence, expeditions were improvised in August 1914, after the outbreak of war, against those colonies in Africa and the South Pacific, the Dominion Governments who were requested to undertake those within their own spheres being reminded that it might be necessary to return the captures at the peace if the enemy should have conquered territory from our allies. But in the initial stages the principal object of the colonial expeditions was to deprive the enemy of naval bases: and very bitter complaints were made by



German naval writers at a later stage of the handicap to the cruiser warfare caused by the lack of such positions. The reason, indeed, for the retention of the German colonies at the peace was the same as that for retaining certain French colonies at the end of the Napoleonic wars, namely that the naval bases were a threat to the security of the British sea communications.<sup>1</sup> The writings of responsible German officials and naval authorities during the war had left no permissible doubt as to the importance attached to strongly defended naval bases oversea for the purpose of attacking commerce and bringing pressure upon Great Britain, Australia and India by that means if they should stand in the way of German expansion.<sup>2</sup>

Though the old disputes between those who advocated "continental" and "maritime" war did not arise (except in so far as an attempt to examine the question of the colonies before the war was shelved), it was resuscitated in another form when Turkey came into the war in November 1914. The "Easterners" wished to make use of the allied command of the sea to open the Dardanelles, which had been closed since the first days of the war when the German cruisers sought shelter at Constantinople, knock Turkey out of the war and

<sup>1</sup> *Vide ante*, p. 112.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. D. Lloyd George, *The truth about the Peace Treaties*, Chapters on the colonial questions.

send Russia the help she needed in munitions as well as enable her to export her wheat. They would have confined the operations in the West to a defensive while developing the strongest offensive possible when the demands for security in the West had been met. In the eyes of the other school this was a proposal to sin against a fundamental principle of concentration of effort. Any operation elsewhere than on the Western front was a "side show" resolutely to be resisted. It is not possible here to enumerate all the pros and cons of the discussion—the measure of security in France, the situation in the Balkans, the Russian needs, the prospects as they appeared of an advance in the West and the doctrine of "killing Germans" as the correct way to win the war. These must be read in the many official and other histories. The purpose here is to draw attention to the existence of a strategical problem which in one or another form is bound always to arise, as it has always arisen, in those wars in which Great Britain is a member of a continental alliance, and the consequent need for clear thinking on the part of ministers, and elaborate preparation, words which may seem platitudinous, but unfortunately experience confirms the strictures passed on British conjunct expeditions by *More Molyneux* in 1759.

Neither clear thinking nor adequate planning and preparation marked the Dardanelles venture. The object was not clearly defined, the method employed violated all the canons of experience of such operations. It had always been an established principle that an attack upon such a defended position was a military operation: the Dardanelles was begun as a naval one. To conceal the preparation, or the destination, of the expedition, to mislead the enemy as to what was to happen, were then elementary precautions. These and others were remarkable in their absence.

To return to the economic warfare and its conduct. It has already been observed that it was soon realised that the allied sea power, shorn of its strength by the Declaration of London, was an ineffective weapon. On 20 August the first restriction was removed by applying the doctrine of continuous voyage to Conditional contraband. In September certain raw materials, listed as free goods in the Declaration but essential for the enemy's military effort in the manufacture of arms, munitions and transport—among them iron ores, rubber and copper—were made Conditional contraband, and these, together with mineral oils, were passed into the "absolute" list in the following month. A year later further extensions were made, though it was not until 1917 that

cotton, a basic material of explosives, was removed from the free list. It is not possible within the limits of space to describe the whole range of measures—trading agreements, black lists, certificates and so forth—adopted to make the economic pressure effective and at the same time preserve a sufficient degree of goodwill and acquiescence on the part of the neutral Powers. Broadly speaking, as experience indicated, the dependence of the enemy's war efforts upon imported raw materials of an ever-increasing range, and upon foodstuffs and the means of producing them—fertilisers—these were declared contraband; and to prevent them from reaching the enemy via neutral territories, the normal neutral imports were ascertained and the Powers concerned were "rationed" to those quantities.

All this took time to develop, but the effects were experienced early; reactions resulted from both neutral and enemy. On the part of the neutrals, opposition was most serious in the United States who, like the Northern Powers in the earlier wars, had goods to sell which the enemy wanted to obtain. The hardships suffered by innocent neutrals is the constant theme of those who oppose the exercise of belligerent rights: those hardships can be measured by the trade returns. A vast increase in the trade of all the

neutral states came into existence. Thus, in the period June–December 1915 the value of American exports to Europe exceeded by 63 % that for the same period in 1913.

The reaction of Germany to the allied measures and to the realisation that she was not going to obtain her expected victory after a short and “joyous” war was to make her turn her eyes from the land to the sea. Her ministers, generals and admirals agreed that the submarine, if it cast aside the restrictions willingly accepted by civilised nations, could bring England to her knees by sinking her merchantmen with torpedoes. She declared her intention to adopt “submarine warfare” on 18 February 1915. The British cabinet ordered reprisals. Germany, said the First Lord,

cannot be allowed to adopt a system of open piracy and murder, or what has always hitherto been called open piracy and murder, on the high seas, while remaining herself protected by the bulwark of international instruments which she has wholly repudiated and defied, and which we, much to our detriment, have respected. There are good reasons for believing that the economic pressure which the navy exerts is beginning to be felt in Germany. A further declaration on the part of the allied governments will promptly be made which will have the effect for the first time of applying the full force of naval pressure to the enemy.

Protests to Germany from the United States

only produced evasive replies, explanations and justifications totally remote from the truth, and promises made only to be broken: for the German High Command was convinced that it had discovered, in this use of the submarine, an instrument which would quickly prove decisive. German acts belied Germany's words, and, offended as the United States was at the British restrictions on her trading, which she considered a violation of neutral rights, the German violations of intrinsic human rights weighed more heavily,<sup>1</sup> and her notes took a sharper tone until at last it became evident, even to the minds of Berlin, that to continue this form of warfare would lead to the active intervention of the United States. Hence, in the autumn of 1915, the first submarine campaign came to an end without any compensating relaxation of the British pressure.

The closing days of 1915 witnessed the abandonment of the attempt on the Dardanelles. At moments, particularly in August, it had come within sight of success. Though it failed to achieve its major object, it had inflicted losses upon Turkey from which she did not recover; and it gave a respectable measure of relief to the Russians in the Caucasus. Those achievements, falling so distressingly short of what had been hoped, and

<sup>1</sup> Cf. the near analogy in the Napoleonic war, *ante*, p. 96.

the perpetual anxiety felt by the German High Command, are indications of what might have been achieved if British ministers could have made up their minds as to the strategy they intended to pursue and had concentrated their efforts upon a single object; if the old and well-proved principles of conducting such operations had been observed, and if careful planning and preparation had preceded the despatch of the army; if the continental school of thought had not ruled the roost; and if, instead of conducting two offensives simultaneously, one in France and one in Gallipoli, one only, and that one fully equipped and provided, had been mounted, with a defensive elsewhere, the thousands of men whose lives were lost in attacks in Flanders which did not carry the allied army appreciably nearer to Germany, or alter the strategical situation in favour of the allies, might well have carried the Dardanelles to a successful conclusion.

After this grievous failure the principal British effort was concentrated on land, in the West, where owing to the weakening of her allies she was being forced to take an ever-increasing part. But she could not confine her exertions to France. Egypt was in need of defence, the Arab revolt against Turkey called for support. At sea, the measures against German supplies were hardening, while

to prevent Rumanian wheat from going to Germany the British Government bought up the stocks. When, later, Germany invaded Rumania, these were burnt, but some fell into her hands and helped to ease a situation which was serious.

Though the German armies continued throughout 1916 to hold their own, victory was not in sight; and Berlin, like Napoleon in his day, recognised that the prime obstacle was Britain. The one thing to be done was to break her, and the weapon was the submarine. In February 1917 a second submarine war was ordered in which practically all restraints were to be thrown aside. Ships, of whatever nationality, were to be sunk without visit, search or warning. The risk that this breach of the engagements made in 1915 with the United States would force her into the war on the side of the allies was accepted, for it was confidently calculated that the ruin of Britain would be completed through the losses of her shipping before American aid could come into effective action.

The entry of the United States brought two immediate benefits to the allies. The flotilla forces were reinforced and the restrictions which her opposition had imposed upon the economic warfare were largely removed. On the other hand, the first results of the submarine campaign gave



a promise that the optimistic calculation would be fulfilled: the losses inflicted on British, allied and neutral shipping were on a scale that threatened disaster until the adoption of the old and well-tried method of convoy was put into use during 1917.

The problem of where the British military effort should be made came up once more when the victories in Palestine had brought the army to Jerusalem in the end of 1917. On the one side it was argued that the winter months could best be employed in "knocking away the props" to Germany by concentrating force in the East and completing the defeat of Turkey; on the other, that it was dangerous to weaken the Western front, where the enemy was bound to attack heavily as early in the coming year as possible. But even without denuding the West it appeared that the existing forces on the East would be sufficient to complete the collapse of Turkey.

The military representatives realise that in view of the potential menace to the Western front, as well as in view of the difficulties of tonnage, there can be no question of a transfer of troops on any considerable scale from the Western to the Eastern theatre. . . . Any additional minor reinforcements, however, that could be set free from East Africa, India or elsewhere should be sent to Palestine. The effects of the losses of shipping were recognised. The question of tonnage and escort is a serious limiting factor both as regards

the actual supply of provisions and munitions to the troops and of railway material, and as regards the possibility of strategic operations depending on the movement of troops by sea.

The military representatives recommended that the allies should undertake a decisive offensive against Turkey to annihilate the Turkish army and cause the collapse of the Turkish resistance.<sup>1</sup> The Supreme War Council took the view that a defensive should be maintained in the West until the American armies were ready, and a strong offensive in the East was decided on in February 1918; but before it could begin the great German attack opened in March and absorbed all available troops and in May the hot weather held up any extensive movements in Palestine. In September the defeat of the enemy in the West had begun and the army in the East swept to the north. A month later the Turks were suing for peace. According to the "Eastern" school of thought this defeat of Turkey could have been brought about at an earlier stage of the war. The strategy was one that took advantage of the sea power of the allies, as the Peninsular War had done, and in its essence is similar to that so greatly favoured by the Duke of Marlborough when proposing to

<sup>1</sup> The military representatives were Generals Henry Wilson, Weygand and Cadorna.

transfer his attacks from the heavily defended front in Flanders to the Mediterranean port of Toulon.

After four months of extreme peril between March and August 1918 the allied armies began their successful offensive which in the battles of the Hundred Days resulted in the capture of 363,000 prisoners and 6400 guns. The German armies were decisively defeated. In September Austria and Bulgaria, and in October Turkey, made offers of peace; on 11 November Germany asked for an armistice. How far did the economic war contribute to this result?

The "blockade" operated in two ways. It deprived the enemy of certain raw materials needed for the armies, such as rubber for their mechanical transport; it caused a lack of food to the troops. But the enemy armies were not disabled, hampered though they were, by want of material. It caused discontent and depression in the civil life. As early as the spring of 1917 the shortage of rations was causing unrest, which increased as it was realised that the promises of a speedy victory through the submarine campaign were not being fulfilled. Revolutionary movements showed themselves in the naval ports and in parts of the country. The occupation of Rumania brought only a little relief and the devastated Ukraine could furnish nothing for many months.

In the winter of 1917-18 the discontent increased, but the armies continued to be adequately fed. It was the great offensive of August 1918 that broke their resistance. In Austria-Hungary the distress was severe as early as the spring of 1917, and internal troubles in the conglomerate Empire were giving rise to anxiety. The Emperor Karl warned his ally that resistance could not be long continued. "We are fighting a new enemy who is more dangerous than the Entente; our enemy is international revolution, which is finding a powerful ally in the general famine." In spite of a good harvest in 1917 the shortage continued. Production without importation could not meet the needs of the country. Bulgaria was little affected by want of food, but the severe methods of rationing and requisitioning caused disorders which, combined with a very natural distrust of their ally, in whose interests alone the people were discovering that they were fighting, undermined the morale both of the people and the army, though the troops fought tenaciously to the end. In Turkey, though there was food, it could not be distributed and want ran riot; the troops, short of food, clothing and medical stores, deserted in large numbers. "The best organised divisions", wrote Mustapha Kemal in 1917, "lose half their numbers by desertion and sickness before they reach the front.

The army cannot remedy this situation. It is a result of general conditions."

The final collapse of the Central Powers was due to a combination of military action and the blockade. The prolongation of the struggle was due to many causes, of which one was the limitations which the various international agreements from 1856 onwards had imposed upon the use of sea power. Apart from that particular aspect of strategy it is not the purpose of this brief outline to attempt to pronounce judgment on the policy and strategy pursued prior to and during the war. Even after the long lapse of years since the "old" wars, and with the vast literature of State Papers and ministerial correspondence available for our study, opinions are not unanimous as to which of the schools of strategical thought was right, the "maritime" or the "continental": nor can the decision be made with the rigidity of an axiom. Thus, while in Sir John Fortescue's view, the younger Pitt was a strategical blunderer, in that of Mahan he and his successive followers rightly discovered the function of Britain in the Napoleonic wars—to shut Napoleon off from the world—and pursued the policy best fitted to perform that function and produce the effect aimed at, Exhaustion, with its final result, Security.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Mahan, *Influence of Sea Power on the French Revolution and Empire*, Vol. II, p. 411.

So, while there are and will continue to be differences of opinion as to whether Britain was right in making so great an effort as she did in the main theatre, whether she should have been more drastic in her treatment of neutral trade, and whether she should have insisted upon—if she could—a defensive in France while “knocking away the props” in other regions, one fact appears plain. It is essential for all the peoples of this maritime Empire to realise the existence and the nature of this eternal problem, with its reactions upon the policy and the armaments that follow. A doctrine needs to be formulated which can be maintained in the face of pressure from other Powers whose eyes are, naturally, turned landwards and whose predisposition is to wish to see a British army, on a continental scale, ready to be thrown to their immediate assistance, and who are inclined to expect at the same time all the benefits which sea power confers to be forthcoming from the Empire. Nor is it less essential that the difficulties of co-operation should be fully realised; nations were no more ready to make some sacrifice of their individual ambitions and interests in the twentieth century than they had been in the seventeenth and eighteenth.



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